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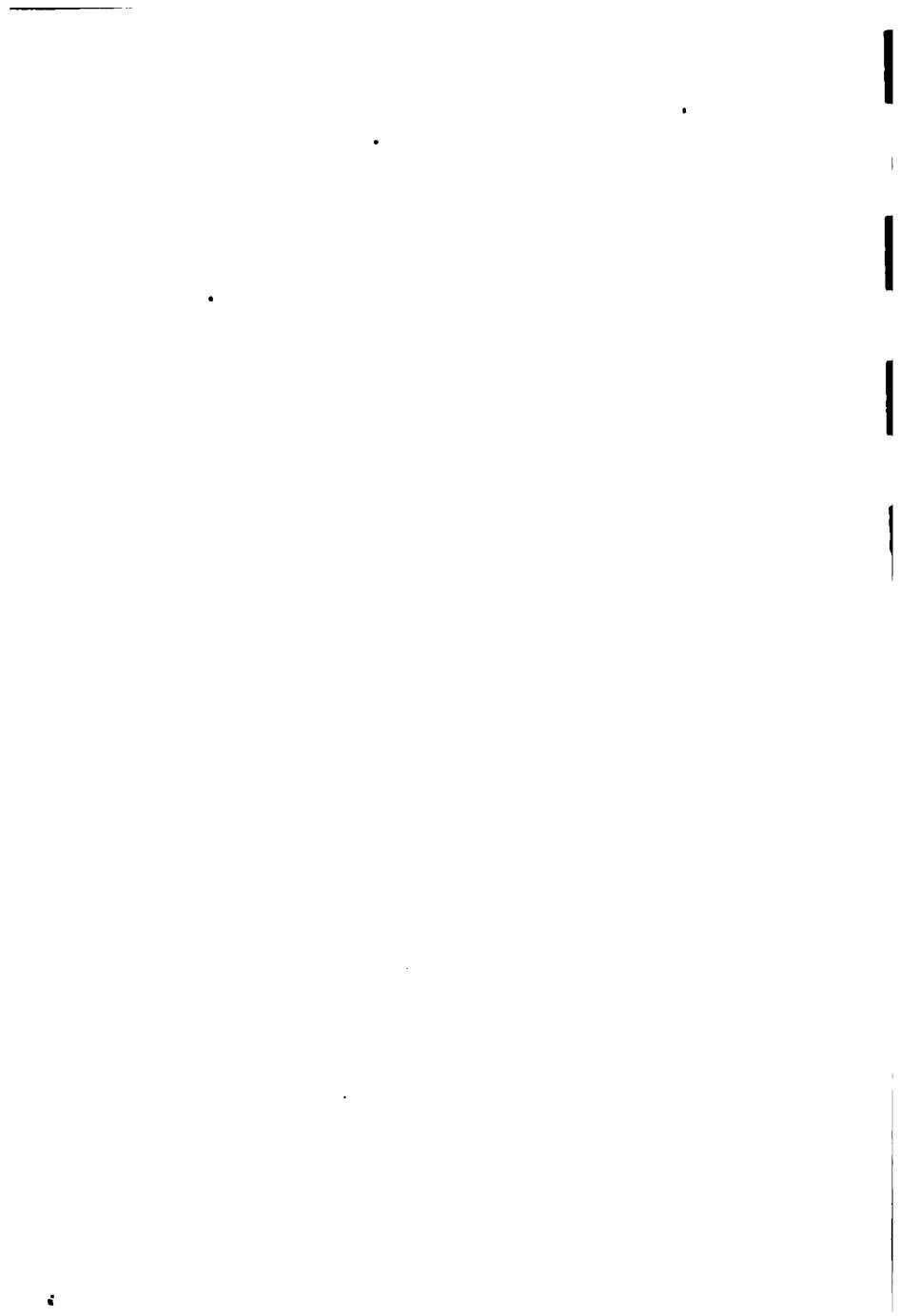
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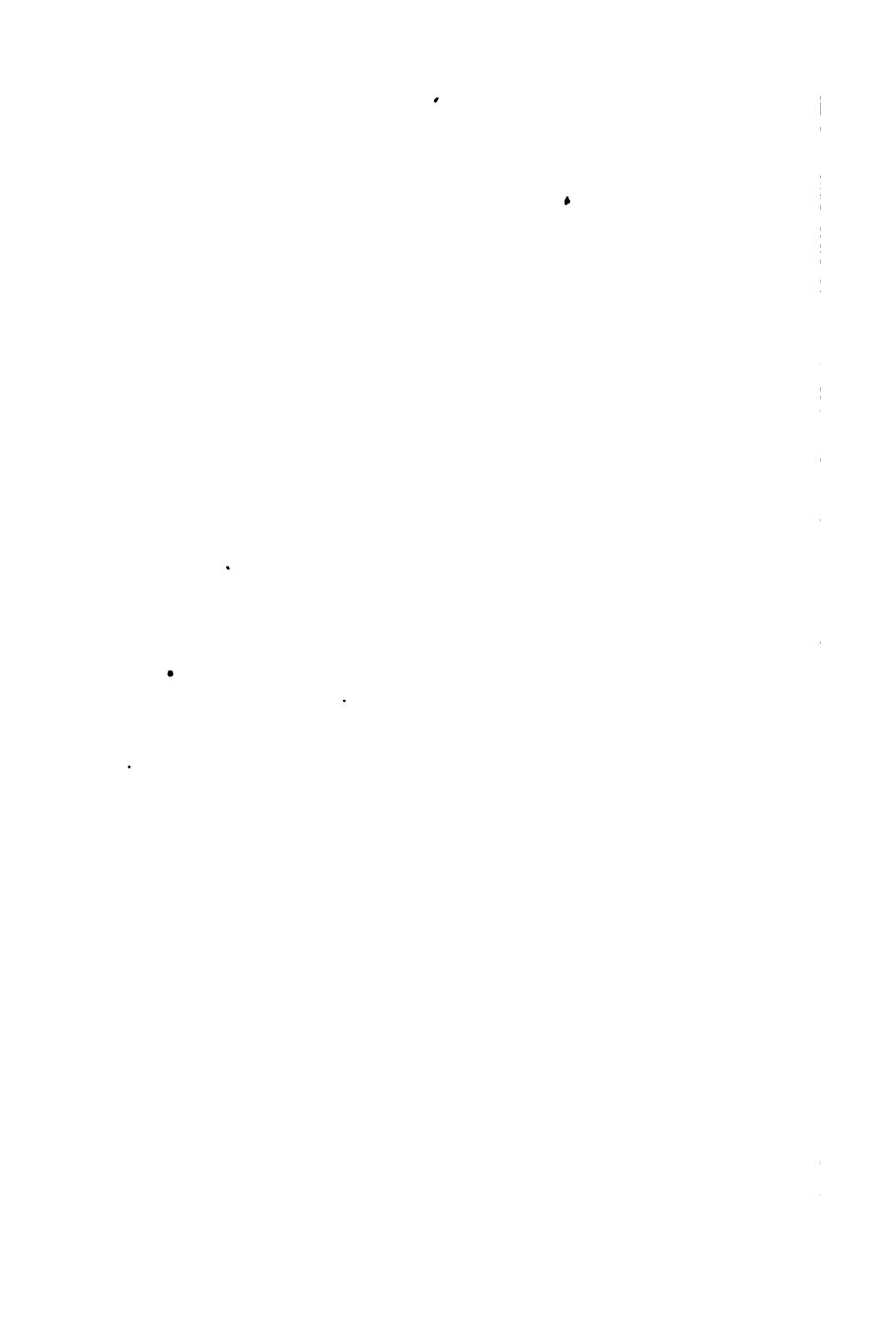
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ALL FOR HIS COUNTRY



THE JAPANESE FLIERS WERE CIRCLING ABOVE THEIR
ARMY'S ADVANCE

(p. 277)

ALL FOR HIS COUNTRY

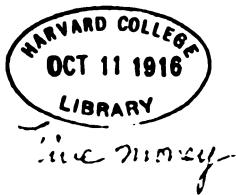
BY

J. U. GIESY

**Author of "The Blue Bomb" and Co-author with
J. B. Smith of the Semi Dual Stories.**

NEW YORK
THE MACAULAY COMPANY
1915

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ALL FOR HIS COUNTRY

CHAPTER I

THE STILLMAN AËRO-DESTROYER

“GENTLEMEN!”

Colonel Frederick Gethelds rapped sharply with a pencil upon the long table at which sat the Strategy Board of the nation. As the head of that board it was his duty to call it to order.

He was iron gray; clean shaven, save for a grizzled mustache; ruddy of face, with eyes of a blue gray, and a squarely molded chin. Despite his fifty odd years he stood as straight as any “pleb” in the academy at West Point, and filled his uniform in a commanding manner. He was head of the board by right of merit.

Gethelds rose. For a moment he let his eyes run over the faces of his official associates. There were Harter of the army, Seaton of the navy — both men of tried and proven worth — and with them men of lesser rank in their respective branches of the service.

There, too, was Captain Monsel of the aviation corps, one of the most expert airmen in the country. And, that the people might not be slighted even in appearances, there were several representatives of the masses in the persons of various Congressmen.

Not the least of these was Jonathan C. Gotz, commonly referred to as “J. C.” Heavy set and florid

was Gotz, with a deceitfully mild blue eye and a smile of ingenious suavity — Gotz of the Committee on Appropriations — an important member on any strategy board.

Gazing into the faces turned toward him, Gethelds began to speak:

"Gentlemen, the chief object of this meeting is the preliminary consideration of the Stillman aëro-destroyer. Some of you have already heard of this from me. The matter was brought to my attention some two days ago in the form of a telegram from Chicago, signed by Mr. Stillman himself, asking for an immediate opportunity to submit plans and a model of his new device.

"Mr. Stillman then stated that he would arrive in Washington last night, and last evening he called me on the 'phone and I made an appointment with him for this morning. He is now waiting in the anteroom, as I am informed. As to the nature of his device I know no more than you do; but I will say this — I knew the young man's father and admired his inventive ability. So I would suggest that we have Mr. Stillman in."

"Protégé of yours, Gethelds?" inquired Gotz softly as the colonel sat down.

Gethelds threw him a glance. "I never saw him," he replied.

"Merely thought you rather rushed his hearing." The Member of Congress smiled. "Well — don't let me delay you."

"Captain Monsel, will you ask Mr. Stillman to come in?" the colonel requested.

Monsel — slender, dark, thin of face — rose and approached the door of the room, spoke to the attendant

without, and came back to his place. The assembled company waited.

The door was opened to admit a young man of some five and twenty, carrying a couple of ordinary traveling cases in his hands. These he deposited just inside the door, straightened, and swept a pair of inquiring dark eyes about the room.

"Colonel Gethelds?" he questioned.

Gethelds half rose. "Mr. Stillman."

The youth smiled and advanced toward the head of the table. "I am Meade Stillman, sir," he began. "I have here a letter from my father, whom you formerly knew." He produced it and gave it to Gethelds, stepped back, and stood waiting while the officer opened the letter and read it through.

At the end the colonel rose and extended his hand in greeting. "I am glad to meet you, my boy. As you say, I knew your father, and I am glad to know his son. Gentlemen," he addressed the assemblage, "this is the Mr. Stillman of whom I spoke. With your permission, I shall now allow him to explain his own mission."

The members moved slightly and whispered as in expectation.

Gotz alone spoke aloud. "Young man, just where do you hail from?"

"From Utah," said Stillman in ready reply.

"Democrat, Republican, or Progressive?" Gotz smiled softly, with a twinkling eye.

"Dad's a Republican, and I guess I inherit his convictions," laughed Stillman.

J. C. chuckled. "Just wanted to get you placed, son," he declared slowly.

Harter frowned slightly. A faint smile twitched the

lips of Commodore Seaton, and he glanced at Monsel, who dropped an eyelid.

Gotz met the evident displeasure of his martial companions with a slow grin. "I'll keep my oar out for the present, you sons of Mars. Go ahead," he advised.

Meade nodded, crossed, and picked up one of the cases by the door. With this he returned to the end of the table and, unlocking the case with a key from his pocket, lifted therefrom a small model, which he placed upon the polished mahogany top.

It was an odd looking affair.

The assembled men drew closer, with craning necks. Those farthest from the head rose and took stations back of their fellows, their eyes fastened upon the shining object before them.

In general lines it appeared a combination of an airship and a monoplane, constructed entirely of metal. Its body was, roughly speaking, of a diamond shape, in its transverse, with each side concave. Longitudinally, it looked something like a torpedo, with two vertical and two lateral fins.

Look at it from any angle you chose and its sides gave a concave curvature to the eye. One-third of the way from the head to the tail the wings jutted out from the sides. It rested upon what appeared to be four metal legs.

A series of ports pierced the sides of the body, and across the under side were a triangular group of dull metallic circles, in marked contrast to the sheen of the rest of the device.

Captain Monsel, his dark face lighted with acute interest, pushed his way to the table beside Stillman and bent to examine the model. "You must generate a

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deuce of a speed to lift her on those wings," he remarked, indicating the twin planes of the craft.

" Rudders merely, sir," returned Stillman. " They, of course, add something to the stability of flight, though the interior gyroscopes provide mainly for that."

Monsel's interest evidently grew, to judge by his expression. " Lateral steerage," he said quickly. " Then where do you get your control of elevation? From those planes?"

" If I may explain as I go along —" suggested Stillman.

Monsel nodded. " Of course. Proceed."

Stillman flushed slightly. A marked nervousness seemed to have been growing upon him ever since Gotz's interruption. His voice was at first scarcely more than a whisper, which slowly grew in volume as he became lost in his subject.

" Gentlemen," he said, " this little aéro-destroyer represents the work of my father and myself for the past seven years. It is, we believe, an air-ship capable of defending the country against any foe which could come against it. In the first place, it is practically impossible for an enemy's fire to do it damage.

" As you notice, the angles of the hull are uniformly concave. A ball impinging upon them would be deflected by its own momentum and slide off into space. Only the steering vanes could be badly crippled by gun fire, and there is an emergency device inside the hull, working on a magnetic principle, which can at need be made to control the ship's course.

" As you heard me tell this gentleman here"—he turned to Monsel—" the stability is taken care of by gyroscopes. We have, then, a stable air-ship, practi-

cally invulnerable to gun fire, which could sail over an army or fleet and destroy it by means of torpedoes or bombs fired from tubes pointed through the various ports in the sides and floor of the hull.

"Furthermore, the construction of the ship is such that, even supposing a shell should pierce the hull, it would necessarily be compelled to destroy that part inside this triangle of dull spots in the body in order to bring the machine to earth."

"One moment," said Monsel. "How do you ascend and land? This model has no wheels or skids—"

"We don't need them," Stillman returned, smiling. "This, sir, is not an aëroplane. It does not require any momentum to launch itself. It rises vertically from the legs upon which it stands and returns upon them. It can therefore land upon or rise from any surface of its own length."

"How?" asked Monsel.

"Let me show you."

Meade bent over the model and laid a finger upon first one, then another, of the dull spots in the hull. To those about the table it appeared that he turned each slightly, so that a tiny opening grew in the center of each. With a hand upon the model, he straightened and swept the company of intent faces with a confident glance.

"When I release the model it will rise," he announced and lifted his hand.

Without any apparent cause the shining toy trembled. Its legs left the surface of the wood and swung free in the air of the room. Then, quite steadily and at uniform rate, it lifted until it hung poised above the heads of the men, now craning their necks to follow its course, and paused on an even keel.

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Stillman turned a triumphant visage upon the staring faces. "You see!" he cried with the enthusiasm of youth. "You see, gentlemen!"

"My God!" stammered Monsel, breaking the tension of the moment.

Gotz cleared his throat. "Yep, I see, son. How is it done?"

Meade Stillman mounted a chair and drew the model to him, manipulated the four tiny spots, and set it back on the table. Then, while the defensive brains of his nation waited, he answered Gotz's question.

"Radium," he said.

"Radium, hell!" For once Gotz's suavity of voice threatened to depart. "You might as well say hen's teeth. Gosh, boy! Do you know what radium costs? It would cost as much to build one of those ships of practical size as it would to fight a war from start to finish — just about."

For the first time since his arrival Meade Stillman showed spirit. "What of it, if one could fight the war, destroy the fleet of an enemy attacking, annihilate its army before it fired a shot — make America invulnerable to the world?"

"Well, it's interesting, at any rate," affirmed the Member of Congress. "Go on and explain how it works."

Practically every member present was now upon his feet, leaning forward about the table.

Stillman began again to speak.

"These four spots which you saw me touch are the gravity screens, as my father and I have named them. That is literally what they are. In reality they are plates of a radio-active substance incased in a leaden chamber and covered with a leaden shutter, which works

on the principle of the iris diaphragm of a microscope. This shutter is, in the large machines, controlled by an internal series of levers which allow them to be opened or closed to any required degree, thereby increasing or cutting down the action of the radio-active plates.

"In that manner the repulsive effect of the lifting force is controlled; or, to speak more correctly, the force of gravity is increased or decreased in its effect upon the hull. In that way the height of ascent is regulated at the will of the pilot.

"In fact, there is no lifting force. What really happens is that the action of gravity is nullified for the time being in a greater or lesser degree, and the centrifugal force of the earth itself throws the ship into the air."

"Marvelous!" said Monsel in a voice slightly thickened by his emotions. "It is the impossible made a fact. Mr. Stillman, will this principle work on a practical scale?"

"That," replied Meade, "is something we have no way of knowing save in theory. We have had no chance to build a full-sized model. Yet, from the working of this, I see no reason why it should not."

Monsel's eyes shone. "If it did — if it would — it means the mastery of the air!"

His words came in a sibilant whisper.

Seaton nodded acquiescence. "Just about, and of all below it, too, Monsel. Mr. Stillman, you said that the ship could be shot to pieces and still stay up unless one part were destroyed. I suppose you referred to these radio-active plates?"

"Yes, sir," Meade responded; "and they'd have to get all four plates. Each one could keep the ship

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afloat if opened to its fullest diameter, though not, perhaps, on an exactly even balance."

"But," objected Harter, speaking as Meade paused, "supposing a shot cut off your lead shutters and exposed the plates within; your ship might start on a sudden voyage for the moon, might it not?"

Meade smiled. "It might if it were not for one feature. These plates only exercise their power under the force of an electric current. If a plate should be totally exposed, the pilot could do one of two things — cut out the other plates and allow the exposed plate to float the ship, or cut the current off the plate itself and so render it inoperative."

"Just so," Harter nodded.

"And I suppose," said Monsel, "that since you use electricity to activate your plates, your motive power is doubtless of the same nature, Mr. Stillman?"

"Yes," admitted Meade. "Motive power is furnished by a compact but powerful storage battery carried in the hull. There is also an auxiliary gas-driven dynamo, which will generate sufficient power to recharge the batteries at least twice."

"And your propeller?"

"Is an aerial variation of the turbine, Mr. Monsel, mounted in small compartments near the nose of the ship and exhausting through two lateral escapes."

"And your probable speed?"

"We don't know that. We estimate a probable two hundred miles an hour; possibly more."

"What do you base that estimate on?" inquired Gotz.

"On the performance of trial models," Stillman replied.

"Breakfast in New York, lunch in Chicago, dinner in San Francisco," said Gotz. "Son, that's going some. What you got in that other case?"

"Drawings for a full-sized ship," returned Meade. Monsel, who had been poring over the model, nodded. "So far as I can see, it's practical," he announced. "It's wonderful, of course, but no more so in its way than other things we now use daily were at the time of their invention. On the whole, it strikes me as what we need."

"Maybe," rejoined J. C.; "except for the prohibitive cost of production."

"You mean the radium plates?" Meade cut in instantly.

"Precisely."

"That is something which I believe could be arranged," said the youth. "You see, my father and I want the country to have this ship. We are offering it to you without any price for the ship itself. All we would ask is that we be allowed to furnish the radioactive plates to equip the vessels at a reasonable profit over the cost of production."

"In other words," drawled J. C., "your idea is to create a market by getting us to take up the ship and then supply the demand yourselves? Well — that's business."

Stillman flushed. "Our idea was to make our country unassailable," he retorted quickly.

Again Gethelds rapped for order. "After all," he remarked, "this is in the nature of a preliminary examination of the device. Doubtless Mr. Stillman came prepared to furnish estimates as to the probable cost of building his invention. I would like to ask him to give us such figures as he may have ready."

"The estimated total would be approximately twenty million dollars per vessel," Meade replied at once.

Seaton frowned. "As much as several dreadnaughts or a small fleet of cruisers," he remarked.

Stillman hastened to retort: "But one ship will be worth more than a dozen dreadnaughts in effectiveness."

"Right you are, son," agreed Gotz; "provided always that your ship will do what you claim. But you've got to hit your navy with your bombs to hurt 'em, I take it. So far, bomb droppin' from aéroplanes hasn't done much damage."

"Ours will," Stillman flashed with a smile. "They're magnetic. Each contains an electromagnet activated by a small cell. If one of them comes within a thousand feet of anything made of iron or steel it will be drawn against it and exploded."

"Good Lord!" gasped Seaton, bent and whispered to Harter. Monsel merely nodded and smiled to himself in a satisfied way.

"You seem to have looked after the details pretty well, young man," said Gotz. "But there's arguments on the other side still. Without trying to in any way criticise the merits of your accomplishment, I'd like to call your attention to the fact that you're planning to gain a monopoly of the war game."

"It'd cause an awful howl and it would put most of the arms-houses and powder-mills out of business, except for commercial purposes. D'ye think they'd stand for it? Not for a holy minute. They'd find a way to get you, son. Without sayin' anything about the right or wrong of the thing, a lot of people make money out of wars. Sometimes a war is the best thing for a country. There's always armies to be equipped and supplies to be furnished."

Stillman straightened and turned toward the speaker. "Surely, sir, you don't mean that you approve of war," he cried, aghast, "merely for the sake of a few commercial interests and the putting of blood-soaked money in their pockets?"

"You said something about shedding blood, about annihilating an army or navy, yourself, m'son," reminded Gotz, grinning.

"The lesson must be taught, yes," Meade flared back. "After that America could arbitrate the peace of the world. We could become indeed the land of the free — the first nation in the world to declare outright for the brotherhood of all men."

"Humph!" Gotz's grin widened. "Son, I reckon you're no Republican," he remarked. "You're a red-flag socialist."

Gethelds rapped for the third time. "Gentlemen, this meeting stands adjourned," he declared. "Think this matter over carefully until our next session. In the meantime I shall have competent engineers examine the plans and model of Mr. Stillman's machine. From my own knowledge I would pronounce it a wonderful invention. I thank you for your careful attention."

Instantly thereafter Meade found himself the center of a group of men seeking to grasp his hand. For a moment Gethelds acted as official introducer, and then left the group about Stillman in order to speak to Gotz, with whom he engaged in a few minutes of low-toned conversation.

At the end the Congressman nodded shortly and made his way to Meade's side.

"Son, you don't want to think I'm putting a spoke in your wheel," he remarked, shaking hands. "I'm in the habit of looking into a thing pretty deeply before

I buy. That's all. I'll look into this one of yours, too. You know I've built a few air-ships in my day. See you again."

One by one the others departed, till only Gethelds remained. He turned to Meade with a smile. "You must come to the house and let me put you up," he invited. "My car's below, and we'll stop at your hotel for your things."

Meade flushed in a bashful discomfort.

"It's very good of you, colonel," he faltered; "but really I don't believe I can. You see, I know nothing of your social usages, after all. I've been a sort of hermit all my life. Dad told me to go to the Raleigh, and I guess I'd better stay there. Not but what I appreciate your—"

"That's enough," laughed the colonel. "You'll go home with me. No use to protest. I want you where I can talk to you about this invention of yours at any time, day or night. And I want you to meet my daughter. She'll never forgive me if I don't bring her the wild man from the West."

"I only hope she won't find me a wild man indeed," said Meade.

"Pack up your model and we'll just about make lunch," directed Gethelds.

Meade complied. They left the room, threaded the corridors, and went down the steps of the Army and Navy Building to where the colonel's motor waited.

Gethelds told the chauffeur to stop at the Raleigh, and, lighting a cigar, settled back in his seat. "And how is old Howard — your father, I mean — my boy?"

"Quite well, colonel."

"You look like him, boy," said Gethelds. "I loved him, when we were both about your age."

"He has told me," Meade replied quickly. "He feels the same."

"Just where has he buried himself?" the colonel asked.

Meade hesitated. "Pardon me, colonel. I can't answer that," he stammered. "Please understand —"

"I do," said the engineer. "Poor How! Somebody framed it up, Meade. I suppose you know that?"

"I?" cried Stillman. "Of course. Do you?"

"I knew Howard Stillman," Gethelds said shortly. "That's enough."

"Thank you, sir." Meade's voice faltered as he spoke.

The car stopped in front of the Raleigh. Stillman got out and went inside. In a few moments he returned with a couple of extra traveling cases, which he placed in the car before rejoining the colonel.

The motor slid away over the asphalt pavement and Gethelds began once more to speak.

"I'm sorry Gotz brought up the political issue with you. He's a rabid Democrat, and his influence is great."

Meade nodded. "So I imagined. Just who is he, colonel?"

"J. C.?" said Gethelds. "Why, you surely know about J. C. He's a Member of Congress; hails from Chicago, and is a pretty wealthy man. He is also a sort of political czar."

"Does he build aëroplanes?"

"Does he?" The colonel smiled. "He builds 'em for the army, my boy. His son is a colonel attached to the aviation corps."

"No wonder he was antagonistic," said Meade.

"We've got to win him over," Gethelds decided. "I

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asked him to dinner to-night, and he's coming. If we could only make him see dollars in it for himself —” He broke off. “ It's too bad you have to use radium.”

“ That is the entire secret of the ship,” returned Meade.

“ Yes, I suppose so. Still, it gives Gotz a plausible objection. How in time did you get on to the thing? I didn't know Howard was up on radium, or that he was rich. You must have spent a fortune.”

“ You, of course, know the source of radium, colonel?” Meade suggested.

Gethelds nodded. “ Mainly pitchblende.”

“ There's a mountain of it in —” Meade checked himself and finished somewhat slowly — “ in Utah.”

“ A mountain of it!” cried the colonel. “ You mean you people have found it? Gad — why, you're rich beyond the dreams of Croesus!”

“ Potentially, yes. If Gotz holds out merely because of cost, I think we can remove the objection. Dad wants the United States to have this destroyer. He wants to give it to the country. Our source of radium will take care of any material wants we may ever have.”

The motor turned into a drive, and stopped beside a handsome residence on Connecticut Avenue, just beyond Dupont Circle. Its lawns and trees gave Meade a sense of pleasure even before his host moved to alight.

They went in from the *porte-cochère* entrance and found themselves in a roomy hall. Gethelds relieved his guest of his hat and summoned a servant to take his bags to his room. Then he led the way into a sort of combination library and den.

“ This is my —” he began, and checked himself to address a girl, who had risen from a comfortable win-

dow seat. "Hello, Biddy! Thought you were out for the day."

Meade at the colonel's back watched the woman. She was young; not, he judged, over twenty at the most; slender, yet virile. Her face was of finely chiseled proportions, straight nosed, broad browed, with a short upper lip, and a well-formed chin.

Her skin was fair without being pallid, tinted with the rich blood of her veins, to an almost shell-like pinkness. Her eyes were gray, like the eyes of Gethelds himself.

But it was her hair, which left the younger man standing, and dumbly staring, as she approached them from the window seat. It was neither red nor brown, but a rich intermediate shade, such as painters have named Titian. It crowned her head in great soft waves of color, set above her creamy skin.

"Like other plans, at times, mine went agley," she said.

"Glad of it," Gethelds responded with a lighting eye which spoke more than his words of his pleasure. "Now you can meet Mr. Stillman, who will be our guest for some days. Meade"—he turned to his companion—"I want you to meet Bernice—my daughter."

"Miss—" began Stillman, and faltered.

A slow flush mounted in his sun-tanned cheeks, dark from his Western life. For a moment he struggled to control his unruly tongue, and suddenly finished with a rush. "It really is you. I thought so when I came in—but I wasn't—"

Miss Gethelds also seemed for the moment to be stricken by surprise. Womanlike, however, she was the first to rally. "Yes, it is really I. Dad, I think Mr. Stillman and I have met before," she said.

CHAPTER II

OPENING AN OLD WOUND

"Met before?" exclaimed Gethelds, taking his turn at being surprised. "See here, Biddy, you must be mistaken. Mr. Stillman only arrived in Washington last evening."

Miss Gethelds's eyes twinkled. "But it was this morning I met him, dad," she smiled.

"But I thought you and Colonel Gotz were going for a motor run this morning?" Her father was manifestly growing more puzzled.

"We did," said Bernice, in a tone of enjoyment. "It was in that way I met Mr. Stillman."

Gethelds glanced from the girl to Meade, who nodded.

"Oh, all right," accepted the colonel. "You people ought to know. Suppose we sit down and you can tell me what happened, if you don't mind." He waved Meade to a chair, and seated himself at his desk, while Bernice perched on an arm of his chair.

"George's car ran away, and George got rattled," she began.

Gethelds started. "Ran away — his car? See here, young woman, just what do you mean?"

"It did; didn't it, Mr. Stillman?" appealed Bernice.

"I think so," agreed Meade.

Gethelds frowned. "Something wrong with his switch?" he inquired.

Meade nodded.

"Well, then, why didn't he smash it?" demanded the colonel.

Bernice smiled. "Well, listen, dad," she said. "George and I had been out for about half an hour, when he suggested running out to see Harold Darling at his hangar. You know Harold's just bought a new Voisin plane. We started, and, just as we came into the avenue off Fifteenth, something went wrong, and the car began to pick up speed.

"A traffic man signaled to George, but he didn't slow down. Then I told him that he was exceeding the limit. He looked at me in a funny sort of way, and told me the car was out of control. At first I didn't believe him; but he pointed to the switch, and I saw it was in neutral.

"I told him to give me the wheel while he tried to stop the engine, but he refused. He seemed really scared. Then, just in front of the Raleigh, he tried to put on the emergency-brake and choke the engine, and the lever snapped short off. George called to me to jump and leaped to his feet, as if he meant to leave the car himself.

"Just at that moment, while we were running and wabbling all over the street, because he had let go of the wheel, Mr. Stillman, here, jumped and landed on the running-board, climbed into the car over my lap, and kicked the switch-box clear off the dash with his heel. I think it's just about an even chance that he saved my beauty at least, if not my life."

Gethelds's arm circled the girl's waist and drew her close. He turned to Stillman. "Meade, my boy," he began, "when you saved my girl you saved all I have in the world — since I lost her mother. I can't thank you in words, but —"

"Colonel," Stillman interrupted in protest, "it was

easy. Please don't make much of a moment's work. I — ”

“ Yet it took a quick eye and hand to jump to that car, and a quick brain to comprehend the need and the necessary action,” his host declared.

“ As Miss Gethelds says, the car was wabbling, or I couldn't have caught it. It was turning almost in a circle at the time,” explained Meade. “ As for the jump, I've lived all my life in the mountains, and learned to judge distance.”

“ What I want to know,” chimed in Bernice, “ is why George couldn't have smashed that switch, as you suggested, and Mr. Stillman did? ”

“ I suppose he didn't think of it after his brake broke,” said Meade quietly.

“ No, I suppose not,” echoed the colonel; “ but why didn't you tell me you had met Bernice? ”

Meade smiled. “ I didn't know it,” he responded with frankness.

Bernice laughed. “ Oh! he was modest in all conscience, dad,” she cut in. “ After he'd stopped the car he climbed out and took off his hat, and ‘ I think it's dead for keeps now,’ he said to George and walked off. I suppose he never gave us another thought.”

“ I most certainly did,” Stillman protested, the color again coming into his cheeks.

“ And,” persisted Miss Gethelds, with a wicked twinkle in her eyes, “ from what dad tells me, like young Lochinvar, you come out of the West.”

“ There, there, Biddy,” expostulated the colonel, “ Mr. Stillman is our guest, to whom we are greatly indebted, and he is not used to your methods of hectoring your admirers. Don't mind her, boy.”

Miss Gethelds slipped from the arm of the chair.

"I have no desire to hector Mr. Stillman, as you say," she retorted. "And to prove my desire to be entertaining, I will if he likes take him all over town in my motor after luncheon."

Meade's speedy acceptance at least proved that it was sincere.

Gethelds smiled. "Get back in time for dinner," he cautioned. "I have asked Congressman Gotz to dine and discuss the Stillman invention."

"Harold's likely to be here, too," said Bernice. "If George hadn't put his car out this morning we were going out and see Harold try out his new plane this afternoon. We'll be back in plenty of time."

When luncheon was finished she was as good as her word, and, loading Meade into her own little roadster, started out to show him the town.

It was a new experience for the man beside her, and one which filled him with a vague delight. Thanks to twenty years of seclusion with his father in the western mountains, he brought to it all the enthusiasm of a boy, undulled by any former experience of urban pleasures or feminine companionship.

The fair creature who drove him through the streets of the beautiful city was to him a goddess of romance.

Had he but known it, he was as refreshing to the maid as she to him. His sinewy strength, his bronzed face, his modest reserve, were to her sophisticated mind a new light on the word man. Like him, she stole glances now and then at his profile and noted its strength of line.

And always she remembered how he had flashed to her rescue only that morning with rare presence of mind.

Fresh, unsullied by any experience of women, Stillman brought twenty years of growing romance to the

ride of that afternoon. Virile with the out-of-door life of his manhood, he plunged all unprepared in any defensive way into the atmosphere of the alluringly gowned, daintily scented woman, who drove him through the first stages of enchantment; and knew his first conscious call of sex in its most appealing dress. The result was a discomfort amounting to ecstasy.

That he spoke not only intelligently but well mirrored his natural strength; for the admiration he gave to his companion amounted not only to admiration for the concrete example of woman, but to veneration for woman in the concrete as well.

Something of this crept subtly to the girl as they rode and spoke together, so that when they came back from that golden afternoon her cheeks were flushed with more than the soft air through which they had ridden, and she used more than her usual care in her toilet before descending to the parlor to welcome her father's guest.

To Meade, coming down from his simple preparation for dinner, which consisted of a wash-up and a brushing of clothes, she flashed as a vision inexperienced before; as a creature of creamy neck and shoulders and arms, bared by the mandate of formal function, which dulled his tongue, while it strangely quickened his pulse until he actually welcomed the arrival of Harold Darling as a relief to his unaccustomed embarrassment and his desire to devour the girl with his eyes.

No contrast could have been greater than that between the Westerner — tanned, dark, clad in a common business suit — and the handsome, blond, perfectly groomed man of the world, who entered the room with an easy step of assurance.

Darling was of typically Saxon fairness, light of

hair, light of eye, light of skin, rather tall and well proportioned, with an air of something like boredom in his listless gait and almost lazy drawl. He advanced to his meeting with Miss Gethelds, accepted her hand, and bowed slightly above it.

"Well, Biddy," said he, "I'm heah to board."

"I was expecting you," smiled Bernice. "Just a moment, Harold, while you meet Mr. Stillman from Utah. Mr. Stillman, Mr. Darling, of the Darlings of Virginia."

Darling gripped the hand of the man from the West in a way which belied his lackadaisical manner.

"Glad to meet you, Stillman," he drawled softly. "Utah, eh? Gad, I've often thought about going out in those parts some day, but it's such an insufferably long ways. I never could scare up the energy, it seems. May some time, though. Like to. Really."

The three found seats. "Did you try out the new plane?" Bernice asked.

"No," sighed Darling. "Looked for you all day, you know, and to no purpose. Really didn't feel like making the effort unless somebody I liked was present. It's beastly to die all alone. Told my mechanic if he wanted to risk his silly neck to go on up without me. Don't know if he did. I came back before he left."

"I was motoring with Mr. Stillman," said Bernice.

"Eh?" exclaimed Darling.

"Yes, with Mr. Stillman," Bernice repeated; "but that isn't the real reason why I didn't see you to-day, however. I feel that I should say that in justice and to avoid bloodshed. As a fact, Colonel Gotz's machine ran away with us this morning, and if it hadn't been for Mr. Stillman you might have been buying flowers."

"For Gotz?" drawled Darling. "'Twould have

been a supreme pleasure. Couldn't the silly chap stop his own motor?"

Miss Gethelds rapidly retold what had occurred and elicited a grin from Harold. "Gad, what a go!" he exclaimed. "I'll have to be telling the boys about that. They'll rag George to death, and him a colonel in the army! George is in for some bad half-hours — yes, he is — really."

"No love lost between you, it seems," said Meade.

"Love?" repeated Darling. "He's my hated rival. Not that I have a chance with Biddy here. Oh, no!"

He pulled a wry face. Bernice laughed softly.

"Harold really is a darling by nature as well as name, Mr. Stillman," she said, smiling. "And, Harold, since you are so interested in aviation, perhaps you might as well know that Mr. Stillman has invented a wonderful air-ship, which dad says will lift itself by pressing a button, or something like that."

"Really, old chap?" Harold gave a fresh interest to his glance toward Meade.

Before he could express himself further Gethelds and Gotz came in, and the conversation became general. Bernice left the room, and a few moments later dinner was announced. To Meade's delight, he found that his hostess was seated between Harold and himself.

It was the latter who started the verbal ball rolling. Leaning directly toward the Member of Congress, he inquired for the colonel. "How's George this evening, Mr. Representative? Did he suffer at all from shock?"

It was a totally unexpected thing, and, despite his control, J. C. flushed slightly under the joking reference to the affair of the morning.

"Not in the least, thank you, Darling," he responded. "And since the matter has been brought up,

which of course I did not intend, I wish to state that both the colonel and I feel deeply indebted to Mr. Stillman for his timely assistance."

"It was nothing, sir," Meade murmured in acute discomfort.

Darling laughed. "It's one on George, though," he chuckled. "I'll revamp an old proverb for George—'A heel in the switch saves the lady fair,' which has nothing to do with hair goods."

"It is scarcely a laughing matter, I think," said J. C. stiffly. "George was naturally very much alarmed lest some injury befall Miss Gethelds. He gave her far more thought than he did his knowledge of engineering. Mr. Stillman, as a disinterested party, felt no personal fear in the matter whatever and acted from a purely unbiased judgment."

"Exactly, sir," accepted Meade.

Gotz turned upon him. "I've got you placed at last," he went on. "Couldn't quite make you out this morning, but I think I fix you now. You're the son of Professor Howard Stillman, who was accused of defalcation of city funds in Chicago some twenty years ago, aren't you?"

A painful hush followed the words. Meade's cheeks grew ruddy with the instinctive rush of blood which the deliberate taunt provoked. "Professor Stillman is my father," he replied with a palpable effort, meeting Gotz's glance with a level stare of challenge.

J. C. nodded.

"He beat the bunch to it an' got away before they could grab him," he resumed in an explanatory manner. "Some of his friends sort of hushed the matter up an' he wasn't followed, so we never knew where he went. So he's alive yet in Utah? Well — well!"

"Quite much alive," said Meade, with a grit in his tones.

"Just where does he hang out?" persisted Gotz.
"Or is it still a secret?"

"We live in Utah," said Meade.

"A large address, but to be expected," chuckled J. C.

"Rotten game politics," cut in Darling, drawling.
"Awful lot of bounders in the business. No place for gentlemen at all nowadays, I take it, eh — what? Let's see, Mr. Gotz — you got into it about twenty years ago yourself, didn't you?"

"Something more," said Gotz shortly. "That's why I remember the Stillman affair so well. I was on the committee which went over his books."

"Right!" accepted Darling. "Of course I don't know except by hearsay. If I am correctly informed, I was some seven years of age at the time and felt small interest in national affairs; but I remember now it was George who told me you first began to exploit gas-engines a bit about that time. Yes, that's it, I'm sure. He said you came into a sum of money some time along there."

"One of my ventures turned out well just before that," Gotz admitted in the tone of one who slaps at an annoying fly.

"Quite nice when they do," declared Darling. "And speaking of gas-engines, they tell me Stillman has invented a new air-ship or something."

Gethelds welcomed the interruption. "It is a wonder," he began quickly. "I really believe one or two of them could defend the country from invasion. We are to go into the matter more fully after dinner."

The colonel believed the atmosphere cleared; but

Gotz rejoined the conversation with something of a sneer in his usually oily tones. Having begun, he seemed determined to pursue his inexcusable line of conduct.

"I'm glad you mentioned this invention, colonel. There is a rather large question in my mind as to how far we should involve ourselves in our dealings with a fugitive from justice. As Darling just now remarked about politics, the Stillman affair was pretty rotten. The man's wife herself couldn't stand the disgrace. In bad health at the time, the shock killed her. That was how he got away. We kept our hands off till he could see her buried, and he took advantage of our consideration. You can say that is what we might have expected, still —"

Meade's fingers gripping the fragile stem of a wine-glass, shattered it to fragments.

The tinkling crash of its dissolution interrupted Gotz's remarks. In a surging rise the young Westerner came to his feet and leaned across the table, unmindful of the ruddy drops which splashed the snowy cloth from a gashed finger he shook before the politician's eyes.

"That's enough!" he snarled with the snap of a wounded beast. "It's my father you're talking about. A fugitive from justice? That's a lie! He is a fugitive from a frame-up. Oh, I'll admit he was foolish, as every man is, who is pure of mind and motive and wants to right public wrongs, is foolish — foolish in an unselfish way. Yes, my father was foolish ever to allow himself to be dragged into the dirty game, or to take office on a reform ticket. But he was an altruist. He was showing up just how dirty the game really was, and the people in danger got him.

"That's all, Mr. J. C. Gotz! I don't know who got that money; neither does my father. But we know somebody did. Somebody stole it and fixed the books to cover the theft. Somebody knew it, and it didn't take the committee—of whom you were one—five minutes to find it when they wished. They knew where to look.

"You say it killed my mother. God pity her!—it did. It made me an orphan at the age of five. You say my father ran away. He did. He had to, because by that time he knew how hopeless it would be to seek for any fair trial in a case which had been built up for his undoing.

"Dad took me and we went away, and he devoted his life to his studies and to me. For twenty years we've lived alone with each other. We perfected this device, and he sent me back to offer it to our country—a gift—a proof of our citizenship. And what was the result?

"I come and I find the nation in the grip of men who think only of money, who would welcome war, that they might equip its armies; who would send men to death gladly, that their blood might create a demand for more equipment, for yet more men; who care for nothing save money, money, money; to whom party, State, nation, are only things to be bartered and sold; men like you, J. C. Gotz! I don't know and I won't accuse, because I can't prove, but in my soul I believe that the committee who examined those books could tell us if they dared where every missing dollar went."

He paused, shaken by his own emotions, and became conscious that Bernice had laid a hand on his arm and was speaking. "Mr. Stillman—Mr. Stillman—you have wounded your hand."

For the first time he noticed the blood upon his finger — upon the whiteness of the cloth, drew himself together and sank back in his chair. "It is nothing," he said dully, and he knew that Gotz was snarling at him: "Your cake's dough now, young man. Take your pretty toy and go back to your robbers' roost, wherever it is, and tell your father that this country doesn't deal with indicted felons. I'm overlooking your remarks about me because, after all, maybe I nagged you to it, and the truth often hurts; but we don't buy pigs in pokes. You can't come out in the open and deal as man to man, and you know it, and we both know why."

He turned to Gethelds.

"Sorry for the scene, colonel. I hadn't meant to bring this up till after dinner. But better even here than in open committee. I scarcely think there's any use in my remaining longer. I'll have to be getting away in a moment, if you'll be so good as to overlook my eating and running. I've got several matters on."

Gethelds nodded and glanced at Bernice, who rose. The party left the table. Gotz made his adieu at once, and Harold declared that he would go with him. While they were leaving Meade, sick at heart, and burning with the realization of the scene he had created, turned into the library, wrapped a handkerchief about his bleeding finger, and sank into a chair.

There Gethelds found him some moments later.

"My boy, my boy," said the colonel, laying a hand upon his shoulder, "I'm sorry. I can't tell you how sorry, Meade, that this should have come to you here. I'm afraid it spoils all your plans, too."

"Don't, sir," muttered Meade thickly. "I know what I've done and I want to apologize. But I couldn't endure his taunts, his insults of my father."

As he ceased and clenched his hands in a gesture of restrained passion, the door opened and Bernice appeared.

"Is Mr. Stillman here?" she began, and caught sight of the tense figure. "I want him, dad, if I can have him for a while," she finished.

Meade rose in silence, and followed her to the hall and along it to a moon-flooded porch, where were wicker tables and chairs. Not until they were seated, did he speak. "I shouldn't think you would ever went even so much as to see me again," he said in miserable self-abnegation.

"I think it was splendid!" the girl declared.

"Splendid? It was the trick of a boor — to make a scene like that at the table of my host. Well, I'm only a wild man, Miss Gethelds, and like all wild men, I know better how to fight than to purr."

"Women like fighters, you know, Mr. Stillman," she said softly. "No real man would have sat longer under that man's insults."

"You are splendid to take it that way," replied Meade. "And all I can do is to apologize humbly."

"Harold tried to steer the conversation," Bernice continued. "Poor Harold. He rather precipitated the trouble I fear by his very badly timed attempt to bait Congressman Gotz."

"Harold seems a queer fellow. Who is he?" asked Meade.

Miss Gethelds laughed. "Just a spoiled darling," she made answer. "He's an awfully nice boy, but he's the last of the branch of the family with more money than he needs. His money smothers his initiative. And now, Mr. Stillman, I want you to do something for me."

"Anything," he promised quickly.

"Tell me all about yourself, and your father, and your life in the West. How is your hand?"

"A mere scratch. I had forgotten all about it."

"Don't you mind pain?" Bernice queried.

"Not when I have a greater — inside."

She nodded. "That is why you should talk," she murmured softly. "That is why I brought you out here. I knew. A woman feels things like that. Speak to me as to a friend, Mr. Stillman — please. And forget what happened to-night."

She leaned back in her wicker lounging chair, and clasped her bare arms behind her head. The moon touched her ruddy crown of hair with a lustrous softness, made pools of mystery out of her eyes, threw her shoulders and upper bust into a soft alluring whiteness before the eyes of the man.

And because he was very young and very natural and human, and because he was wounded in his pride, he spoke his soul to her. He spoke bitterly at the rebuff he had received, and what it would mean to his father.

When he had finished Bernice unlinked her fingers, put down an arm, and laid her hand across his. "Poor boy," she said softly. "The barb struck deep, I see. I am sorry — yes, really. But don't be bitter. After all it is men like your father, and mine, and yourself, who must save the nation if danger ever threatens. It isn't your country which hurts you to-night, but one of your country's misfortunes. Forget the barb, and think of the nation."

Meade nodded.

For a moment he could not speak. The soft, warm palm covering his hand seemed to his high fancy the accolade of a queen. "The hurt will pass," he spoke

after a bit, from a swelling heart. "I shall go home. To-night spelled the ruin of my mission. Gotz will fight me now from a personal basis. Well—I'll go home, and live on with dad, till he no longer needs me. Then, perhaps, this trip has shown me how great a land I live in—perhaps if I still feel the same, I'll come back—or if the country should need it—and I could help. But at all events it will be a long time."

"You can't tell," said the girl slowly. "There are rumors in the very breezes nowadays. I pray God that it may not come, but if it should, remember your country, Mr. Stillman. My father and I believe in your wonderful invention. If your country should need it, would you come?"

Meade rose and stood before her, very straight and very virile and very boyish in the moonlight. "If such a time should come there are two calls I would answer—that of my country—and you," he made reply.

Then he turned abruptly and left her alone.

CHAPTER III

THE HONORABLE J. C. GETS BUSY

THE Honorable J. C. Gotz entered his motor, started his engine, jerked in his gears, and rolled swiftly away from Gethelds, smoking a very long and very large cigar. Darling beside him lighted a cigarette and puffed its smoke into the air, from lips which smiled.

"Where shall I put you down?" inquired the Member of Congress when they were past Dupont Circle, headed down-town.

"The Columbia Club will do, thank you," said Harold. "Any other place will do as well if it's out of your way. I merely came along as a matter of tact. Tact is useful, don't you think?"

"If you'd showed a little to-night, 'twould have been better," grunted his companion. "Your springing that stuff about George got under my skin. George and I don't always agree, but, darn it, Darling, he's my boy, an' I'll back him to the last shot, in anything he does. Well we both made considerable asses of ourselves, and I went farther than I meant to, which I don't generally do. At the same time I don't approve either of Stillman, father or son, or of their machine, which is almost prohibitive in cost to begin with."

"How so?" inquired Darling.

"It needs radium to run it," chuckled Gotz.

"Radium!" ejaculated Harold. "Where'd they get enough to equip with?"

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"They don't say," replied J. C. "They offer to furnish it at a nominal profit, but they won't say anything more, and then there's the old man's past record, no matter what the boy says. Too bad I rubbed an old sore, though. I sort of wish I'd left that alone. Well, here we are at your club."

Harold climbed down. "Thanks for the lift," he remarked. "And—I say—about the little matter of this morning. I was an awful bounder to mention it this evening, but we'd all been rather ragging each other, before you and Gethelds came in, and I fancy I wasn't quite normal in my sense of proportion. Anyway, let's let it die. Right?"

"Sure! You're a decent chap, Darling," accepted Gotz, as he let in his clutch and drove away.

He went immediately home and entered the library of his mansion. There he discovered his only son, the colonel, lounging in a chair.

"Hello, son," he greeted. "Well, I cut that cock's comb to-night, I guess all right. Things broke just right for me to do it, so I run in that old Chicago matter about his dad on him at dinner, and he blew up. I rather think I squared your account for you."

"Squared my account! What do you mean?" the colonel inquired.

"Eh?" said Gotz. "Didn't you know it was Stillman stopped your motor this morning?"

"No. He didn't introduce himself," retorted his son.

"Well, it was all right. I thanked him for it, too."

His heir sat up in his chair and gazed straight at him. "You brought up the business of twenty years ago, at dinner?" he questioned slowly.

"Sure thing. He lost his head, and as good as ac-

cused me of being the real thief." Gotz chuckled gruffly.

"Rot!" exclaimed the colonel, throwing himself back in his seat. "What beastly bad form you showed. What got into you?"

"Well—I'm damned!" Gotz senior paused and inspected his offspring. "What's form got to do with the thing? I showed him up."

"You showed yourself up good and proper, too," retorted the colonel with some heat.

"Well, Darling started it by asking me if you were suffering from shock after the runaway," growled his father.

The colonel lighted a cigarette.

"That lazy fool," he sneered. "Why pay attention to what he says? He waves a red flag of sarcasm, and you put down your head and gore a bystander, eh? That don't sound much like J. C. Gotz."

"That's right, too, son," admitted his father. "I really shot off too soon."

Colonel George frowned.

"All right, Gov. I guess you're only human, and we all slip sometimes. I can't jaw you for taking my part, though it was a rotten sort of break to make. I fancy I'll go up and see Bernice this evening and see what she has to say. I don't want to get in bad there, and that confounded Darling is hanging around her too much of late."

"He's a pretty decent fellow all the same," said Gotz. "I sort of thought he didn't like me, but he acted white to-night. I took him to his club after the run-in, and he apologized like a gentleman, for what he had said. But don't you worry, son. He's too friendly with that girl to be anything else. If he'd do

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something he might have a chance, but he won't. He's rich enough not to care, and he ain't in politics or business, so he don't give a hang what anybody thinks. Well, I guess I'll go over to the Army and Navy Club. I want to see Harter and Seaton and Monsel. I told Stillman I'd kill his proposition and I want to get to those fellows before Gethelds does."

"Kill it?" repeated the colonel. "Why, you've got to kill it anyway. That was decided before it started."

Gotz chuckled.

"Rather, son, but this is a better excuse. Why, if they took up with this thing we might as well go out of business. Barring the first cost, it would be a bargain-counter protection for any nation. With one or two of those ships, we wouldn't need aëroplanes any more than a new-born kitten needs teeth. You bet, we got to kill it. Well, watch the old man. He ain't mad now. Darn that fellow. He's the only man's made me lose my head for a good many years. Say, call up the Army and Navy, and have 'em tell those fellows I'm coming over. Then I'll run you up toward Gethelds and go on from there."

"Right."

The colonel nodded, picked up a desk phone and called the Army and Navy Club. After a moment's wait he spoke into the transmitter, hung up the receiver, and replaced the instrument on the desk. He rose, picked up a silk hat from the corner of the desk, and glanced at his father. The two men left the room.

Meanwhile a page was passing through the lounge of the clubhouse, calling: "General Harter, Commodore Seaton, Captain Monsel," as he walked.

The men he sought had foregathered in comfortable chairs, in a recess by an open window. Beside them

stood a table, and a tray of ice-chilled drinks, served in long, thin glasses, and crowned with tiny aromatic sprigs of green.

Harter turned at the voice of the page, and snapped his fingers. "Here, boy," he hailed in well modulated accents. The page hurried over. "Congressman Gotz wishes to meet you here shortly, sir," said he.

"Very well." Harter turned back to his companions.

In a few moments Gotz entered the room and came across to where the three men sat. He quickly drew up another chair. "Good evening, gentlemen," he greeted as he sat down. "Hope I didn't inconvenience you any by my request for a talk?"

"We had nothing on," said Harter, "and we rather wanted to hear your opinion on the Stillman device. Suppose that's what brought you. Glad you came."

Gotz nodded. "I thought you'd be wise to what I wanted," he made answer. He hitched his chair nearer the table.

"I've known a lot of theories to work well on a small scale and fall down on a big one," he went on. "The only way we could prove this thing right on a practical scale would be to build one, and that would cost as much as a little navy. Now, can we afford to make an experiment like that? We know what the boats would do. Seaton can tell you. But this thing would be a twenty-million-dollar question-mark."

"We have to admit the question, of course," said Monsel.

"And at that," Gotz resumed, "we aren't too sure of the estimated cost. Gentlemen, you know what radium costs, and you know how hard it is to get. Stillman claims that his ship rises by a sort of radium

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power, and he estimates that a certain amount will float his full-sized craft. But just supposing that his figures are out even a few grains in amount.

"That would mean either the failure to work or an additional outlay, which might make the thing cost twenty million, thirty million, any figure, before we could even give it a trial. As business men, is it, I ask you, a sound proposition? Can I, as a member of the Committee on Appropriations cast a vote to gamble to that extent on a problematical project?"

Harter pursed his lips.

"That is the business view of the matter surely, I admit," he remarked. "You look at it from that side, of course, J. C. We — Seaton and Monsel and I — regard it merely from the professional side. At the same time it does look like a pretty big order. Then, too, the Stillmans say they would furnish the radium, and the stuff's pretty hard to get. How could they get it any better than we could? I've been thinking about that all day."

J. C. smiled.

"So would any man," he returned. "I have myself. Where *are* they going to get the stuff? Suppose that after we'd done our part, built a ship, and spent a lot of money, they were unable to do theirs. There is that possibility, as I want to point out; because, what other reason can they have for refusing to clearly outline their proposition save the need of secrecy as to the source of the radium supply? If anything should happen to that supply, then what?"

"Radium is indestructible," said Seaton.

"That ain't what I mean," returned Gotz. "Suppose they are getting their supply from government land — mining it a little at a time. They might be do-

ing something like that — taking it from us with one hand and selling it back with the other."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Monsel. "That would be a game. Could they do it?"

"Why not?" questioned Gotz. "Utah is a thinly populated country. There are counties as big as Eastern States, with the population of a country village. Easy? Why, it would be too easy, Monsel."

The captain shook his head and sipped his drink.

"Still, it's a pity," he began again. "Now that we are liable to get mixed up with our friends across the Rio Grande, with the possible complication that our little slant-eyed brothers of Nippon might welcome such a chance to mix in, I'd like to see something of this sort taken up. I'd feel a blamed sight surer of the result, I think."

"That's right," said Seaton. Harter nodded.

Gotz laughed. "That's funny talk from three arms of the service," he made comment. "I know you boys too well to think you've got anything like cold feet. The Mexican government isn't going to start anything with Uncle Sam; and as for the Japs, they're a bit too wise. Still, for the sake of argument, suppose they did. What would happen? They'd get licked."

"Seaton knows we've got as good a fleet, boat for boat, as any country — as good as Japan's. Harter knows what our army can do; and a call for volunteers would give us a million men in a fortnight, if we needed that many. Monsel knows our aviators are as good as the next ones. Ain't I right? Well, then, let 'em all howl; and if they try to do more'n that, why, we'll do what we've done before — give 'em hell."

"If they hold off till the canal's open," mused Seaton. "That's a weak point just now, Mr. Gotz."

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"Oh, maybe!" J. C. waved the argument aside. "It might cause us some trouble with the islands, and even on the Pacific coast for a bit; but that would end it."

"They've really got an army right there now," Harter suggested. "Most of the Japs in that part have followed the colors. Given a leader, they would be a trained corps at a moment's notice, and could co-operate with the landing army."

"If they ever landed an army," smiled Gotz.

"They could do that," Monsel stated shortly. "There's a lot of good places — thinly settled stretches of seacoast with deep water close in — in those parts. Why, that very condition exists at Half Moon Bay, not much over a score of miles from San Francisco itself. Oh, yes; they could land an army, Gotz."

"Well, and what if they did? Would it ever get anywhere but underground?" the Congressman grunted.

Monsel laughed. "At least our friend has faith in his country's ability to take care of herself," he observed.

"You bet!" declared Gotz, grinning. "An' while we were chewing up the landed fellows th' navy could sink their boats, an' they'd be cut off completely. Nothing to it, really. It wouldn't last a month; I doubt if it would last a week. Monsel himself might get leave of absence from th' board, and sail out and drop a few bombs on their heads."

The aviator's dark face grew pensive.

"Still, if they should land — if they should destroy, say, San Francisco or Los Angeles, and work inland, that would be the very best argument for a ship such as Stillman's. The property loss in such a happening

would pay for a dozen such craft, to say nothing of the loss in life."

"You're sort of stuck on the thing, ain't you, Monsel?" said Gotz. "It sort of appeals to your love of flying high. But that ain't business. Th' question is, do we really need it, an' can we really afford to take it up on Stillman's say-so?"

"An' here's somethin' I didn't intend or even want to mention, but I guess I'd better now. I knew th' boy's father twenty years ago in Chicago. He was indicted for embezzlement of city funds after he'd been elected as treasurer on a reform ticket. He never was tried, because he ran away too soon, and I never heard of him again till to-day."

"That boy's father?" exclaimed Harter quickly.

"Yep. That boy's father. Howard Stillman, general."

"Then he is still a fugitive from the law?" The general's face and tone were grave.

"I guess that's about the size of it," said Gotz.

"You're sure of the facts — of the identity, Mr. Gotz?"

"Sure, general. It's in black and white out in my home city. And to-night I asked Stillman at Gethelds's and he admitted that his father was the same man."

Harter shook his head slowly. "Bad," he muttered. "Bad."

"Maybe that will show you why I'm a bit scary about going very far into this radium business with those people," Gotz pursued his argument. "The fact of the matter is, I don't just know how far we ought to go — not until we investigate a few things at least."

"Your idea, then, would merely be to hold the ques-

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tion open until those things could be determined?" said Harter.

"Sure."

Monsel smiled.

"I was rather afraid you might take an antagonistic stand for trade reasons," he observed.

J. C. grinned as he replied: "I saw through you, too, captain. No. I've made enough to live on if I don't turn another dollar, and to give George somethin' to struggle along on, too, when I'm gone, I guess. But I will admit I'm mighty suspicious of these people and their ability to deliver. I say let's hang things up till we find out just where we stand. Then we can be sure of what we do."

"That's fair enough, as I see it," agreed Harter. "Don't you think so, Seaton?"

"I think Mr. Gotz has at least showed us a grave possibility for future trouble, unless we proceed with great caution," responded the naval member.

Monsel chuckled. "I always did like a gamble," he declared.

"That's why you're willing to risk your neck in our machines," rejoined Gotz.

"I believe the boy's square, at any rate," asserted the captain.

"I don't say he ain't, either," returned Gotz quickly. "He may believe all he says — probably does. He talks as if he did. But if he is, he can't be hurt by our looking the matter up, can he?"

"No-o," grudged Monsel. "But I hate the delay. Honestly, I believe we're about due for trouble. Still — maybe you're right. I'll sleep on it, I guess."

"All right. Take your time." Gotz rose. "I don't want to hurry you, boys. You know I'm on the

misers' committee, and I have to watch the little dollars to keep you from blowing them in. Well, think it over before it comes up again. Good night."

And while the Member of Congress ran his car back to his home with a satisfied smile on his face, a young man sat alone in a room in the house of his father's friend and buried his face in his hands.

He was an unhappy young man, for a castle built of air, through years of patient toiling, had tumbled rudely about his ears. His first contact with the world he did not know had bruised a proud and sensitive spirit which had as yet failed to react from the buffeting it had received. And, like the native creatures of the wilds, hurt, wounded, he longed for his well-known solitudes in which to nurse his hurt.

By a sort of mental reflex his thoughts ran to the hut in the mountains and to his father, the one companion he had known well since he was a child.

He reviewed all their life and planning for the last few years, since they had worked on the air-ship plans; recalled all their dreams of perfecting it and taking it to their country to add to her prestige and strength, working gradually up to that day when success was finally theirs, and that which had been in the future became the fact of the present, and the hermit of twenty years had turned to him and said:

"Son, you shall take the trip now, at last, and take the air-ship with you. I will write to my old friend Gethelds, and he will smooth the way for you. Fred and I were chums in college, and I know he'll help you in this. It seems as though fate must have put him at the head of the nation's board at this time so as to make things easy for us."

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He recalled the trip he had made, the ride over the thirty miles of trail, the journey by motor and rail, each step of it a revelation to his unsophisticated mind, in which he had seen for the first time in life the things which heretofore had been only names to him. And he smiled.

So perfect had been his instruction that he had known each thing as he saw it and accepted it without undue surprise. Only at the end of the journey had anything occurred to disturb him, and that was the utter discomfiture of all his plans — the discovery that, even in the nation's seat of power, the old story of twenty years ago still lived to bar one of his name from acceptance.

He clenched his hands. Had there been justice in it, it would have been less hard to understand. But its injustice rankled like a poisoned barb.

He rose, drew paper from one of his cases, and a pen from his pocket. Then seating himself at a table equipped with a miniature bedside electrolier, he began to write:

DEAR Miss GETHELDS:

I am going back to the hills and seek to gain some of their strength in my soul. Twenty years of seclusion have not fitted me to cope with men of the world. But I have seen, and I shall study, for the time which even some here, as I believe, think is coming.

Remember me to your kind father. And please do not think it a boyish pique, or a disinclination to face the issue which takes me away. It is merely an understanding of the present situation, when dollars, no matter how made, count for more than life, or liberty, or country, or honor. No, dear friend, I am not bitter, though my words sound like it. I just see how it is. But, as I told you to-night, if ever

my country needs me — really needs me, or you — if you should need me, I will be ready, and I shall come.

Most sincerely,

MEADE STILLMAN.

Enclosing this in an envelope addressed to Bernice, he left it on the table, rose, and packed his bags. Then he sat down and waited until the house grew quiet. One o'clock came, and two.

The moon was riding far over in the west. He rose and tiptoed into the hall of the silent house, carrying his cases.

The soft carpets gave out no sound from his tread as he passed along the hall and down the stairs. A spring lock held the outer door. He slid it back, slipped out, and drew it to behind him.

Quite boldly he walked down the steps and turned toward the city. To his rugged, mountain strength the four cases mattered little. He trudged steadily forward, away from the house of Gethelds.

Far to the east a tall, white spire stood out against the sky bathed to silver brilliance in the moon. The walking man paused, set down his cases, and removed his hat. "To you, George Washington," he exclaimed softly. "You, too, were misunderstood, maligned, and attacked; yet now they raise that column up to you and hail you a hero of the world!"

Replacing his hat, he took up his burden. And neither the agent employed at Gotz's suggestion nor all the inquiries of his father's friend could place a name upon the place he went.

CHAPTER IV

MEADE STILLMAN COMES HOME

'AND in that place the sunrise is pink and red and golden, and the sun comes up from a crooked sky-line and hangs like a burnished shield of brass above the eastern mountains. Vast cliffs of dull red sandstone stretch before one in zigzag course and fantastic shape, weather-worn, set into tower and pinnacle and massive bastion.

He who moves across that country does so at his peril. Unless he be a habitant, he is well-nigh certain to grow confused and lost. Only experience can teach the way through the maze of nature's forming, where the tangle of hills mislead and the deceptive mirage floats above the plateau and paints pictures of the Never-Never Land.

And the wind blows in parts of that country as nowhere else. Ever the wind blows, whence and whither no man knows. But it sighs and sobs forever like a dirge for the things that are dead.

To the west of that region is the mighty gorge of a cañon through which rolls the torrent of a river. Its waters boil and thrash through a world of quicksand, or dash themselves against the feet of the red and yellow cliffs. And at one point on the western bank of that stream stands a cluster of houses, a little more than a hamlet, clinging like the gray knobs of a weather-beaten lichen to the stern, set face of nature.

It is the little town of Hite.

Into Hite in the dusk of an evening came a young man of five and twenty, his face and clothing powdered with the dust of his journey. That he was no stranger was shown by the assurance of the course he took and the nods or handwaves of the men he passed.

Yet that he was not one of their accepted number showed subtly in their manner of greeting, in some way different from that they gave their fellows.

He was slender and dark of complexion, with a clear line of white skin between hair and eyes, where the band of his Stetson kept off the sun. Without pause or checking he rode straight to the corral of Nephi Larsen.

Larsen sat in the doorway of his house, smoking a pipe. He was a large man, blond, his hair tawny, his beard a reddish yellow, his fair skin burned to a red by constant exposure to the out of doors, his eyes a pallid blue. Without any surprise he glanced up at the new arrival, withdrew his pipe-stem from his mouth, and nodded slowly.

"Hello! Maister Stillman," he greeted, and sat on.

Meade swung himself from the saddle of the horse he was riding, slipped its bridle over his arm, and led it, and the pack animal loaded with his cases and camping outfit, toward the corral at the back of the house.

"I'll be spending the night with you, Larsen," he informed the man in the doorway.

Larsen nodded, and gestured with his pipe to the animals Stillman led. "Ay vil tell mine wife. Ven you haf put de horses by de corral you will haf sooper."

"I'll leave these with you and take the mustangs in the morning," called Meade. He went on and turned the horses into the corral, after slipping off saddle and pack.

Over the supper, Larsen waxed more loquacious. "Ay sup-pose you haf seen maany tings by your journey; yas?" he questioned with a light of placid interest in his eyes.

"Oh, yes," Meade began, and sketched briefly his trip to the East and his return.

Larsen nodded, fumbled for his pipe, and set it alight. "You vas by Salt Lake Ceety?" he suggested.

"Of course," said Meade.

"You vas by the temple?"

"Yes, I saw it. It's a very fine building."

Larsen smiled slightly. "Yas. Eet iss de finest building in de whol' worldt. None iss there better. Eet iss de house of de Lordt. De whol' worldt has none so fine."

Meade felt a quiver of inward amusement, followed by one of pity for the simple-minded giant who, like many of his rural brothers, still believed that the temple of his faith was the finest creation of human hands.

"It surely is a beautiful thing!" he said quickly, and saw Larsen nod in satisfied acceptance.

Night came down. Meade left the house of Larsen and walked out toward the edge of the river. He clenched his hands with an instinctive motion, then dropped them at his sides and looked off across the stream to the east. Over there was a hut in the mountains, where his father waited.

Over there away, and away beyond was a woman with hair like burnished copper, whose image dwelt in his heart. Turning, he went back to his lodging and threw himself down to sleep.

The pink of morning saw him ready to start. His mount was a wiry Indian pony, spotted in brown and cream irregularly. Behind it he led a second dun col-

ored specimen, burdened with his pack. He crossed the river in a flat-bottomed boat, swung from a hempen cable, and took up the lonely trail.

At last, when the hamlet was lost to his vision, and only the crags and peaks showed around him, he straightened in his saddle and stretched his arms wide. "Home," he said to the dumb and silent fastness. "Home. This is the place where I belong. Like you, ye crags, I am a product of the desert. I am a thing apart."

The sunset of the second day was growing red when he came to the lip of the valley. The sun god was shooting his arrows far across it in flaring ribbons of color. He smiled to himself through the grime of his journey which powdered his face and hair.

Off beyond was a dark wall of orchard and shade trees, things of his father's planting. Among them squatted the house of red stone which that same father had builded — his own home for twenty years — the only setting of life he had known as he grew to manhood. Farther beyond it all a long, low structure met his eye — the laboratory building.

Little creatures which he knew to be cattle and horses moved slowly across the green expanse as he gazed. The cool of the picture struck up to his eye, and beckoned him to it from the heat through which he had ridden.

He clucked to his horses and urged them down the trail from the lip of the plateau. And so Meade Stillman came home.

The purple of evening was creeping into the valley as he rode up to the house of red sandstone and slipped from the saddle. A figure appeared in the doorway,

gazed in surprised recognition at the unexpected arrival, uttered a cry, and approached.

"Meade, my son. Back so soon?" cried Stillman, and seized the hand of the one who had returned.

Meade nodded. "Back again, dad, and glad to get here," he said quickly. "You're well?"

"Oh, yes," replied his father, putting aside the question. "But you? What brings you back?"

"I was through with my mission," said Meade.

His father lifted his eyes and gazed full into those of his son. "They accepted it so soon?" he faltered. "It is an accomplished thing?"

Meade felt a choking grip rise in his throat before that vibrant appeal. Words failed him. He dropped his eyes from the ones which questioned and shook his head.

"No?" Stillman senior bowed his head also.

He was not a commanding figure of a man. Not over five feet eight, he was stooped with the stoop of the student. Yet his face was strongly drawn, with iron-gray hair, and a gray shot beard, cut short and square, and the gray of his eyes was clear.

As he stood with bowed head beside his son in silent acceptance of the failure of a hope, one might have imagined that the two were engaged in some last rite above a thing which had lived and was dead. At length the elder said, "Tell me, my boy."

Meade sighed.

"There isn't a great deal to tell," he began. "I went to Washington. I wired Colonel Gethelds from Chicago. He gave me an immediate hearing. Both he and Captain Monsel, of the aviation corps, were greatly taken with the destroyer, and pronounced it practical.

But there was a man named Gotz — a sort of political boss and a Member of Congress, as well as the man who holds the government contracts for their aëroplanes, who spoiled our plans.

“ He raised an objection to the cost of the plates. That, however, was only an excuse, I am sure. His real reason was that he knew it meant the loss of his contracts, and against that the country’s welfare could go hang. Well, he killed it. That’s all, dad. You told me not to tell generally about our pitchblende deposits, and I mentioned it only to Gethelds. Maybe if I’d told the rest it might have made a difference, but I doubt it. Gotz didn’t dare let the ship go through. We were beaten for the benefit of his machines. So I came home.”

Stillman senior nodded. “ I knew him years ago. He hasn’t changed, it seems. Well, never mind it, boy. Put up the horses and come in. Supper is being prepared. Maybe some time they’ll need us and send to us for the help they refused. No labor goes for vain in this world. The time was not ripe. I allowed my wishes to make me premature.”

Meade unsaddled and turned his horses into the pasture, went in and sat at the table. Spring Water, a Navajo squaw, and her daughter, served the supper. With the stolidity of their race they greeted him as one returned from the fields rather than from a journey of weeks.

Without any sign he slipped back into the rut of the old existence and took up the routine of years. The desert which ringed him once more folded him in its embrace in the same old fashion. Everything was the same.

That night he sat for a long time under the trees and

talked to his father, detailing the minor incidents of his trip. And later still he stretched out in the same old room where he had grown from childhood to manhood.

Yes, it was all the same, or if there was a difference it was in himself.

And as the days went by he knew that there was a difference — that in many ways he was not the same man who had left the valley for the trip to the East — that the glimpse of the outer world had changed him so that never again would he be the same. The hills and the valley and the desert were the same as they had been before, and would be forever; but there *was* a difference in himself.

As the days went past he came to put a name upon the vague unrest which at times filled him. He called it the "call of kind."

Nights when the moon was full he walked in the valley, where the cool of the verdant fields of alfalfa hung sweet on the air. He would always picture to himself the moon-flooded porch of a city mansion, and a man, and a girl with a wonder crown of hair, dark in the moonlight, and creamy throat and arms.

Like the mirage of his own desert, the picture swung before him, and beckoned him beyond; weaving a subtle spell above his senses, until by sheer force of will he threw it off and roused himself to his real surroundings. And he knew that this was what he really meant when he spoke of the "call of kind."

He had told her he would always remember, and he was living his word with all the latent romance of an unfilled youth.

He crept out before daylight as he had done since a boy, and watched the glory of the sunrise, when the rosy heralds of the coming day marched steadily up

the sky. And out of his thoughts, his day dreams of romance, his night rides above the rim of his valley, there grew a purpose in his breast. In the midst of his dreams of the woman ever an ugly dragon of scandal raised its head.

As he grew and ripened from the experience which had been his, he came to see that he might not go to her until he had slain the ugly monster. He came to see that he dare not offer to her a name besmudged with the hint of dishonor, and he began to understand what the mild, studious man he called father must have suffered through all the years.

And from this there came his purpose to find some way to remove the sinister smudge from the name he bore. With his purpose in mind he set about acquiring an education from the only source at hand.

He drew his father into long conversations about his former life, seeking to learn from his descriptions as much as he could of the world which had once been his; striving to learn of the means by which such men as Gotz acquired the things they desired; something of the political methods by which such calamities as had overtaken his father were produced.

Perhaps the elder realized that he had sent the youth too unprepared to his meeting with unknown conditions, for he spoke to him far more freely than ever before. Meade learned of undreamed depths of guile and guilt which left him aquiver with a righteous anger.

For the first time he came into verbal contact with civic and corporate graft and vice; learned of the bribery of officials, of suborned courts, of corrupted delegates of the people, of the thing called "protection," which could be bought and paid for in city, or State, or nation, according to price. For the first

time he learned why it was that the guardians of the people allowed them to be robbed, and the robber to escape, why high tribunals found entirely new and undreamed interpretations of the laws.

And when it was over he had boiled the matter down to four little words, and those four were: "There's money in it."

It seemed from that that he had found the answer he sought. With money, surely some one would be found to delve into the records of twenty years ago, and find the true answer as to who had taken that other money and thrown the blame upon an innocent man.

The next morning he rose to greet the sunrise, went outside and stood facing the east. Already a thready line of pink was tinting the sky above the circle of rim rock. He stood and watched it, and pictured the full glory of the sun above the far city where dwelt the girl. Long ere this she was awake.

Did she ever think of the man who had gone back to the West?

The pink deepened to rose and crept forward and upward, its color touching the edges of some floating clouds. He threw back his head and raised his face. It was the morning of a new day. To the man it was still the morning of life. He threw out his arms and said: "I will win — I will."

That day he began preparations to renew work on the deposits of pitchblende lying on the adjacent lands that he and his father had taken such pains to perfect their title to. That it would be slow work he knew. The past had shown how slow it would be. But he was not discouraged.

As yet the frantic haste of the outer world had not crept into his blood. If the time was long, the result

to him, at least, seemed sure. He would extract the radium from the blonde. He would go East and sell what he had, and get money.

With money he would find the real thief of that other money, and clear away all suspicion of stain from his name. Then — then he would answer that call of kind which men called love. He would go to a mansion in a distant city, where a tall, white shaft shone ghost-like at night in the moonlight, and there he would find the woman.

His plan was primitive but direct. He set about bringing it to pass.

And that night he sat down and wrote a letter. It was the second of its kind he had ever written. And he lost a day and a night and a second day while he rode down to mail that missive to a woman.

But he was young, and he was human. So he took it, and mailed it at Hite.

CHAPTER V

WAR!

ON August 19 — a column of Mexican Federal troops crossed the international boundary and fell upon the United States forces patrolling the border.

While not entirely unexpected, yet the suddenness of the movement when it came enabled the Mexicans to deliver a defeat upon the force which they attacked. The first stroke was delivered from Naco in the state of Sonora, and within twenty-four hours an engagement was precipitated by another column, that opened fire upon the American patrol east of El Paso, near the little town of Guadalupe on the Mexican side.

This second attack was driven back and pursued beyond the Rio Grande by a regiment of colored cavalry, who were in turn ambushed on the Mexican side and cut off to a man.

The entire affair was rendered extremely easy because of the fact that large bodies of Mexican federals had been operating in both Sonora and Chihuahua for a long time against the local so-called constitutional troops of those states; and the massing of the attacking columns had therefore excited no suspicion in the minds of the troops on the American side of the river.

The government at Washington, which had up to now maintained a position of neutrality in the Mexican situation, immediately demanded an explanation. Secretary of State Ryan worded his message in somewhat

dramatic language; for even his pacific nature was stirred by the apparently unprovoked action. The Mexican reply was that the federal troops had acted upon orders from the City of Mexico itself.

Whereupon the Mexican minister was handed his passports and the American people woke up to the fact that they had a war on their hands.

In the meantime the troops along the border were having a rather bad time. Outnumbered by overwhelming odds, they retired in good order — but at the same time they *retired*. Several of the frontier towns fell into the hands of the invaders and became the scenes of frightful demonstrations of human savagery.

This was the situation on the night of the seventeenth of August.

All over the nation, and particularly in Washington itself, excitement ran high. Not since the Spanish War had there been such scenes of popular feeling. To this was added the difference that in 1898 the war was a matter of largely deliberate purpose, a thing expected.

In the present instance it was unsought — sought to be avoided in every way consistent with the standing of the nation. As a result the people clamored for vengeance with a no uncertain voice.

Immediately upon the receipt of the Mexican reply, the President called a meeting of the Cabinet and the Strategy Board. The call was issued at three o'clock on the morning of the seventeenth. Colonel Gethelds, hurrying through the halls of his home, his uniform half buttoned, paused at the sound of a voice, and became aware of a white clad figure, confronting him near the stairs.

"Dad, what is it?" said Bernice.

"Special call of the Cabinet and Board, Biddy," he told her. "It's urgent. I must hurry. I 'phoned the garage for the car."

The eyes of his daughter seemed to grow dark at his answer. She put out a hand and laid it on the rail at the stair head. "It is war, then?" she faltered. "War?"

"Yes, I think so." Gethelds finished buttoning his tunic. "Good-by. Go back to bed." He ran down the stairs. She heard him leave the house and a moment later the hum of the motor which carried him away to the meeting.

Left alone, the girl stood for a time, clinging to the rail of the stairs. Then she straightened a slender figure in the dim light of the night lamp, and crept back to her room. She drew on stockings and slippers and threw a bedroom robe about her flimsy gown.

She dragged a chair to a window and sat down. So while the night passed and the morning came she sat brooding as women have brooded for years uncounted under the red pall of war. It was not that she feared for any of her own, but with the seriousness which sometimes comes to youth and maidenhood, she was painting mental pictures of the fates of others.

In the pale gray of the new day she rose and went to a little desk in the corner of the apartment and unlocked it. From a drawer she took a common white envelope and lifted it to read the postmark. Smudged and blurred by careless stamping, she made out the name of "Hite" under date of a year before.

She locked it away and began to dress.

She went down and made sure that breakfast would be waiting for her father's return. Since her mother's death, three years before, she had held the household

reins. When nine had come and gone and the colonel hadn't put in an appearance, she ate her own meal and went about her other duties.

The loneliness, the tension of waiting, irked her more and more. She went up, dressed, and came down. She made her way to the garage at the rear and told the chauffeur to get out her own roadster.

When it was ready she took her seat and drove down to the city to see things for herself. So at last she edged her way into the fringe of a jostling crowd in front of a bulletin-board.

For the benefit of the crowd, the pasting of bulletins had been abandoned by this particular paper and a megaphone stationed in a second-story window. From this the news was called to the swarm of anxious hearers in stentorian tones, even as she had seen and heard the rounds of a prize-fight reported ere now.

"Latest advices from General Carton, commanding troops along the border, report a slow but steady advance of the Mexican troops north and east from El Paso. The Mexicans are advancing in two columns, and are well equipped with light field guns and rapid-fires. Several skirmishes have been fought during the last twenty-four hours.

"Several American aëroplanes are flying continually above the Mexican advance, and have done them considerable damage. Douglas, Arizona, reports railroad from Calumet to Naco in Mexican hands. Mexico massing more troops at Calumet for apparent advance on Douglas. Rebel forces joining federals at Agua Prieta."

The hundreds standing beneath the sweep of the words muttered and shuffled and mouthed. Almost at once the bellowing voice resumed:

"We have it on definite authority that the Atlantic fleet will sail at once for Mexican waters."

The yell which greeted the information defied any verbal description. Bernice became conscious that she herself was adding to the outcry. She saw men fall into each other's arms and burst into frantic outcries and a pounding of backs.

A grizzled face, streaked with tears, came into her nearer vision. The man was standing beside the roadster, his soft felt hat in his hand, his visage raised to hers.

"Denny is in ut!" he exclaimed to her directly. "That's my bhye, miss. He's on th' *Pennsylvania*. He's in number four turret, an' he's a devil to shoot. Glory be, when he turns loose wid his rifle. Huroo! Huroo!" He began to dance and wave the hat in his hand.

The sound of the yelling had died somewhat. Bernice, listening now became aware that the megaphone man was shouting: "The Star Spangled Banner, you folks. Sing it! Sing!"

Like a match to powder the idea flashed in the minds below him. They began to sing the stirring words and rhythm:

The Star Spangled Banner—
Oh, long may it wave
O'er the land of the free
And the home of the brave.

In grand and mighty harmony it rose and rolled down from the hundreds of throats, a very paean lifted to the skies.

Quite unexpectedly, Miss Gethelds found that her own cheeks were wet and her throat given over to a

painful throbbing. She let in the clutch of her motor and rolled away toward the Treasury Building and on to the Army and Navy Department, where she drew up to the curb.

Yet even as she bent to shut off the engine, she became conscious of a uniformed figure descending the stairs, and advancing toward her, cap in hand.

"Ah, Colonel Gotz; you are just the man I want to see," she smiled.

Gotz bowed as he took her extended hand. "How can I serve you?" he inquired.

"Tell me what they are doing in there," demanded Bernice. "Father was called at three this morning, and he hasn't returned. I couldn't stand the tension so I drove down. Can you tell me anything?"

"The board is still in session," he returned. "I have just been before them. I leave to-night for the front to take charge of the corps in the field. I was coming up to tell you good-by before I left, Miss Bernice."

His dark eyes lifted and swept her face swiftly, as he spoke.

"You leave for the front," she repeated. "Goodness! Aren't you nervous? Why — this rather brings the war home to one, when one's friends begin to be ordered to service. If you were going somewhere, I'll give you a lift."

Gotz smiled, hitched up his sword and entered the car.

"Nervous," he said, reverting to the first of her remark. "Why, no. It'll be a sort of lark, I guess. None of us really are specially worried about the outcome of this business. It will be over in a month or six weeks, Miss Bernice."

"Well, I hope so," she sighed as she started the car. "Where to, *mon colonel*?"

"I was going home," he answered, and added abruptly: "I wish you meant that."

"Meant what?" Bernice slammed into third speed with a jerk.

"*Mon colonel*," said Gotz quickly. "I'd like to take that with me from your lips."

"I might say that to any loyal officer of my country, called to the front at such a time," countered Bernice in haste. "Go, *mon colonel*, and luck go with you."

Gotz's answering smile lacked something of spontaneity.

"That is hardly the way I want you to say it, Miss Bernice," he rejoined. "I know this isn't a very formal time or place, but things are moving quickly, and I'm going away. This war is a tempest in a teapot, of course, but — well, some people will die, and — oh, Bernice, you know what I want to say. I love you, girl — I want to take your promise with me. I was coming up to see you and ask you to be my wife, when I come back. Bernice, will you give me that promise?"

"I'm sorry," said Miss Gethelds. "Honestly, George, I'm sorry. I like you, but not in that way. Please don't let's talk any more about it. You see —"

"But I'll make you care — in that way, if you'll give me the chance. I can do it," urged her companion. "After I come back, I'll make you care, Bernice. This is my first chance to show what my machines can do. Don't take all heart out of the work —"

Her eyes came up and met his squarely. "Take the heart out of your work?" she cried out sharply. "George, what do you mean by saying a thing like

that? You are not working for me, but for the country —”

“Oh, hang the country!” the man flung out shortly.

“Stop!” said Bernice. “I won’t listen to anything more like that.”

“Many a man has forgotten country for a woman,” returned Gotz in stubborn accents.

“Not if he really loved his country,” Bernice responded. “I’m sorry I have had to hurt you at this time, but I don’t think it will really make any difference in your fighting — not after you are really yourself.”

Gotz laughed shortly.

“And I think it will,” he muttered. “I’ll fight like the deuce now, you can rest assured. There’s nothing else to do. I suppose I’ll make those Mexican peons raise a wholesale respect for gringo aeroplanes.”

“I hear one of our planes dropped a bomb on a battery of theirs,” observed Bernice, seizing the chance for a change of subject.

“The planes are the only arms that are doing anything at present,” returned Gotz. “They are making the Mexican advance some job, so far as I can hear. Carton says they have practically saved his army.”

“Fine!” cried the girl. She brought the roadster to a rolling stop by the curb in front of the colonel’s home. “When you get down there we expect to hear that they prove even more efficient. Will you be up later?”

Gotz, on the curb, shook his head.

“I hardly think so. I was coming for a certain purpose, and there is no need now. I think I’ll say good-by here. I expect to be pretty busy before I get away.”

He put out his hand in hesitant fashion.

The girl in the auto took it frankly and gripped it.
“Good-by, George, and God bless you. I’m sorry about the rest, but I just can’t help it.”

“At least, I may write?” he questioned.

“Of course. Do. I wish you would. I’ll watch for the letters. Good-by.”

The talk with Gotz had given her food for fresh thought, and she turned her car homeward and ran slowly along the tree-bowered streets.

The crowd in front of the newspaper bulletins was larger than before. It was after five, and the office employees had added themselves to its volume. Young men and young women, the latter in shirt-waists and skirts for the most part, had built a new fringe about the center of the human mass.

Their faces were eager with interest. Here and there a girl was clinging to the arm of a youth, who was standing very straight, head up, eyes flashing. Bernice could imagine that he had just expressed some idea of volunteering, if the nation should ask for men. Admiration, mixed with fear, seemed to lurk in the face of more than one woman in the crowd.

The megaphone was barking again:

“Troops entraining at Oakland for the south. All troops except those manning the harbor defenses ordered from the Presidio at San Francisco. They will be rushed to the border at once.”

The crowd shrieked. The woman in the motor smiled. Here, after all, was where patriotism lived—here in the hearts of the people.

While it lives, oh, surely the country was safe. Strangely cheered, she turned her car out of the rush and started home for the second time.

A long, rakish roadster with a long, rakish hood

stood in front of the house as she turned in from the street. She could descry a figure in white flannels on the porch, lounging back in a wicker chair. It rose as she stopped at the side of the house and came toward her.

She recognized Harold Darling with a sense of relief. She had known him since childhood and had always found him the same.

"Hello, Darling," she smiled. It was their joking way of address.

"'Lo, Biddy," he returned in his languid accents. "Been resting on your porch for an hour. Beastly excitement down town. Stood around for an hour and watched it. It tired me all out. Came up to rest in your presence and found you out. Everybody out. Looked in the sideboard, and the whisky was out, too. Come on in and give me a drink."

"I'm awfully glad you came up, Harold," laughed Bernice, as he helped her from the motor. "Dad's at the board. He's been there since three this morning. I've been most awfully restless. I stood it as long as I could, then I took the car and went down town. I ran into Colonel Gotz, and he proposed to me, and—"

"You'd better have a drink with me," said Darling. "You've certainly had enough to upset you. We'd better hurry, too. Get me the things and I'll mix you an elegant cocktail. I want you to drink a toast with me."

They entered the house, and Bernice unlocked a small cellar of liquors. Darling at once set to work, after ringing for ice, and she sank into a chair and watched him. At the end of some moments he handed her a glass of his concoction.

"Drink it, pretty creature; it will do you good," he

admonished, and picked up a second glass. "Confusion to all my country's enemies!" He drank it off.

Bernice sipped at the mixture and set down the glass. "You almost said that as if you meant it," she remarked.

"Meant it? By Jove, yes!" said Darling. "You know inside of me I'm frightfully aroused by the present crisis. Why, if it wasn't for the effort involved, I'd be tempted to take my 'plane' and go down and fly around a bit, and drop some bombs on their silly heads myself. As a child, I remember that I exploded a torpedo on a bald man's head one glorious Fourth of July. The effects were terrific—to myself. Sometimes I still wake up at night and remember. I—"

"Oh, you're incorrigible!" cried Bernice.

"That's what my father remarked at the time," rejoined Darling. He fished the cherry out of his glass. "So Georgie Gotz proposed?"

"Yes."

"Presumptuous bounder," said Harold. "Wants to get out of his class. Suppose you gave him the what for? Mustn't marry beneath you, Biddy. Now, as to myself. I'm more of the sort for your husband. Suppose it wouldn't do any good to ask you to marry me?"

"Is that a proposal?" his companion laughed toward him.

"Most certainly, dear maid. The last of many. You know—"

"I know you too well, and too long," flashed Bernice. "Why don't you do something? I like people who do things. I saw a young fellow, a clerk, down in the crowds to-day. I'm sure he wanted to volunteer, from the look on his face, and the girl with him looked so proud of him—"

"But nobody's called for volunteers," objected Darling. "As for doing things, why my people did them for several generations. You can find all about it in several genealogical records—"

"And you're living on the strength of past performances, Harold?"

"Do you know," he returned, "I fancy my old ones must have used up more than their share of energy in doing those things. As a result, I am chronically averse to exertion, and there's nothing worth doing after all. It's all been done such a jolly lot of times, and rather better than I fancy I could do it—eh, what?"

"Well, then, I'll tell you what you can do, and do well, too," said Bernice, giving up. "Stay and have dinner with me. Dad hasn't come home, and I'm awfully lonesome; and I *do* like to talk to you."

"Right," assented Darling. "I'll be kinder to your request than you were to mine. I'll accept *your* proposal, dear lady."

"You always are kind," she mused aloud. "Don't you ever grow provoked or angry?"

"It's such an exertion — this getting angry," he began slowly.

She sprang to her feet almost in impatience. "Well — perhaps you can smoke a cigarette while I see about dinner," she well-nigh snapped as she turned and left the room.

Left alone, Darling lighted his cigarette and sat smoking. After a time he began speaking half aloud to himself.

"Do something, eh? Gad, she's a girl with a spirit! Do something? Now if this thing was a real war —

perhaps. I hope they'll keep an eye on that little old Canal. It will bear watching. Do something? It would be worth a man's while. Oh, yes."

He tossed the cigarette to a tray and was sitting with half-closed lids when Bernice came back.

Dinner was served and passed. Darling stayed on. Bernice took him out to the broad front porch and they sat and spoke of inconsequential things while the evening grew into night. Despite herself, the soft drawling speech of the man lulled the girl to a sense of repose as the hours lengthened.

She confessed to herself that the man was an enigma. Once, as a newsboy rushed by, carrying a dispatch under the heading of Panama, she fancied she heard him catch his breath, just before he called the boy to him and bought a paper.

With a muttered apology, he turned to the article and read it, and laughed. "It's merely a cruiser, ordered from Panama to blockade Acapulco. For a moment I was afraid the beggars might have managed to get the little old ditch blown up. It would be a rather unfortunate matter if they should. So much effort lost, don't you know. Makes one tired to even think about the thing."

"There's a *chaise-longue* over there if you're exhausted," she laughed in reply.

Darling suffered one of his rare lapses into something like the English of the States. "You never tire me, Biddy. You rest me," he said quickly. "When with you I am nearest my heart's desire. On my honor, dear girl."

"What is the matter with all the men to-day?" she retorted, half piqued. "When you talk like that,

Harold, you make me unhappy. Why can't you just treat me like your little sister?—I don't mean to be funny or hackneyed, old boy."

"Little sister," said Darling softly. "Well, I never had one. My parents neglected to provide one. Biddy, will you be just that to me? Will you confide in me and make me your big brother?"

"Will I? It will be jolly," she exclaimed gayly. "I never had a brother either, you know, Harold. And now you're my onliest brother?"

"Yes, thanks," said Darling. He bent quickly and kissed her. "As a brother, you know," he explained.

"I never saw one so enthusiastic," said Bernice slowly. "I don't believe you did it like a brother, Harold. You took advantage."

"You're right," he responded shortly. "I ask your pardon. I kissed you merely like a man; God knows with what respect, Bernice."

Strangely affected, she made no answer. They sat on. Presently the man began again to speak. Little by little they took up their interrupted conversation.

At last, between ten and eleven, a taxi put Gethelds down at the curb, and Darling rose. He waited until the colonel had come wearily up the steps, shook hands, ran down to his motor, and called a laughing good night. The engine purred softly as he started the car, and rolled swiftly out of sight.

With her father's arm about her, Bernice reentered the house. "Hungry, daddy?" she questioned. "I had cook leave things so I could get you a lunch."

Her father shook his head, smiling. "No. Only tired, Biddy, girl. They fed us at least."

"Then come into the den and I'll fix you a julep," she suggested, led him in and seated him in an easy chair

to rest, while she prepared the drink which she presently served beside him on his desk.

Dropping down opposite, in a characteristic posture, she leaned her rounded forearms on the top of the desk, and raised her eyes to his. "Now tell me all about it," she urged.

Gethelds took a sip of his julep, smacked his lips in appreciation, and smiled. "That picks one up. Tell you all about what, Biddy, girl?"

"What the board decided. What are we going to do as a country?"

Her father's gray eyes twinkled. He put down the glass he was holding and nodded. "We're going to lick these Mexicans and send them home again," he replied.

"Of course. How?"

"Well"—Gethelds paused as though to marshal his facts concisely—"the troops will go from the Presidio, from Fort Leavenworth, from Forts Logan, at Denver, and Douglas, at Salt Lake. If that isn't enough, we'll send others. The fleet will blockade their ports east and west. Those are the main facts.

"If necessary we'll even throw a column inland against their capital itself. We figure that the regular army can do it. At most we'll not need more than a few of the National Guards. Our latest reports tonight were that Carton had succeeded in massing his men and had taken a strong position, and expected to check their advance to-morrow.

"Great numbers of the inhabitants of that section have joined his ranks and will fight. In fact, several bands of them are harassing the Mexican flanks right now. You don't need to worry, Biddy. It really won't be much of a war. The only thing which puzzles

us is what ever led the fools to try such a thing. It's ridiculous on the face of it. Now I think I'll go to bed. We played a long game over the military chess-board to-day and I'm tired." He rose, drained his glass, and kissed her.

Bernice smiled.

His confident attitude did much to quiet her excited emotions. She followed him up-stairs and went on to her room. The last thing she heard as she dropped into an easy slumber was the voice of a newsboy passing the house: "Atlantic fleet sails for Vera Cruz! All the latest news from the scene of the war!"

And the next morning a note awaited her at her plate. It was from Harold. She opened it and read it with no little wonder:

DEAR LITTLE SISTER: Have been thinking it over and decided to really have a try at doing something. Am leaving Washington to-night. Will tell you the rest after I see what I accomplish. This is by way of saying good-by.

DARLING.

It was dated the night before. She frowned as she laid it down and poured her father's coffee. Some way it impressed her that she didn't know just what it meant. In fact the developments of the past week were entirely inexplicable. Could she and the officials at Washington have foreseen whither the Mexican war was tending, the reign of terror that followed might have been avoided.

But this might be said of all the colossal mistakes of history!

CHAPTER VI

THE FALL OF SAN FRANCISCO

THE movement of the United States troops was marked by a rapidity of action which resulted in throwing thirty thousand armed men into the field inside the first week. In the meanwhile Carton fought two drawn battles, and retired slowly on the line of his advancing reënforcements.

He at least succeeded in making the Mexican gain a thing of feet rather than miles from day to day, and handled his small force in a masterly manner. With the arrival of the fresh forces the American army assumed the offensive, and delivered a crushing check to their foes near the town of Kent in Texas.

Thereafter the war took on a steady character of American advance and Mexican retreat. The lost territory was regained and the invading forces not only were driven into their own country, but pursued beyond the Rio Grande.

The states of Chihuahua and eastern Sonora became the scenes of several engagements in which Mexico lost many men and much ground.

From the seat of hostilities Colonel Gotz wrote several letters to Bernice, describing the actions, and the part played by the aviation corps. The air-men were proving of incalculable service after the border was reached, in the capacity of scouts in advance of the Amerian columns.

Gotz laughingly reminded her of his prediction that

the war was in the nature of a farce, and predicted his early return to Washington.

In the meantime the American fleet had completely invested the port of Vera Cruz, had finally landed a heavy force and was threatening an advance upon the City of Mexico. Despite all of which the southern country, plainly defeated, continued to fight a steadily losing struggle, without any indication of suing for peace.

So far Bernice had had no word from Darling.

The man had apparently dropped out of sight. To tell the truth, she missed him more than she would have expected, and when an invitation came from her father's sister in New York to come up for the opera season in October, she asked his permission, and wrote to accept.

By that time affairs in the United States had returned to an approximate normal. The first feverish excitement marking the breaking out of the war had subsided. A general opinion that the matter would soon be settled prevailed throughout the country; and except for the press accounts of some minor or major action by the army in the field but little notice was taken by the masses.

The situation approached that existing during the pacification of the Philippines after their seizure. The termination of the matter rested with the properly vested powers, and the people gave their attention to more personal affairs. This was the situation on the 1st of October.

On the 2nd, just before she left for New York, Bernice received another letter from Gotz. After describing the local situation as "quiet," he went on to say:

They apparently do not need me here any longer. I received orders an hour ago to proceed to San Francisco and take charge of the equipment of a couple of aëroplane tenders now building at the Mare Island yard. So it's me for the routine life again. I've enjoyed this thing as a whole, and I believe that I've done good work while here. The corps is licked into snappy shape, and have put the fear of the Lord into these little brown idiots. When they see a plane coming now, they act like chickens when they spot a hawk. Leave here to-morrow. Will write you from Frisco.

Such things as these sent Bernice Gethelds to New York on the 3rd of October with a light heart and the expectation of an enjoyable time.

And yet several things had happened even before that time, and occurred immediately after, which might have pointed the results to follow, or so it seems in the light of retrospection. For instance, in the latter part of August, a portion of the Japanese fleet sailed on a practice cruise, with the avowed intention of calling at various European ports.

They stopped at Manila, were diplomatically entertained, and departed westward. They were afterward reported from Bombay, Suez, and various Mediterranean ports, and passed Gibraltar, October 2nd. They announced their next point of call at Barcelona, where they remained for several days.

On the 3rd of October a large vessel chartered for the purpose, sailed from Vancouver, jammed with two thousand Japanese laborers from various points in British Columbia. This vessel cleared for the Hawaiian Islands, and its departure was recorded by a paragraph in the papers, covering some scant four lines.

On the morning of the 4th of October the Japanese

government officially notified the United States that its fleet would call at various ports and expected to be among the first vessels of war to pass through the Panama Canal, and as by parallel the Secretary of War, on the same day, received a code message which caused him to visit the White House, and afterward summon the Strategy Board to a meeting.

"Gentlemen," said Secretary Barrison, when the board was assembled, "I desire to lay before you a message from a man in whose judgment I place a great deal of faith. I received it a few hours ago. Translated from the code it reads: 'Pursuant with your instructions I have done my best to arrive at some true understanding of the anomalous situation we referred to. There is a peculiar atmosphere of confident expectation pervading this city, despite the recent results of military operations.'

"' This is only explainable in my judgment to some secret affecting the probable future actions of some outside power. Without being in definite possession of their plans can only surmise from present conditions. Would, however, advise taking steps for the mobilization of large bodies of volunteer forces, and the mobilization of large bodies of an efficient aëroplane corps at San Francisco.'

"' Same would apply to eastern seaboard in neighborhood of New York. Believe action of Mexico in nature of feint attack, preliminary to some international action by larger power.' Gentlemen, this message comes from the City of Mexico itself. I have replied to it, instructing the man who sent it to return here at once, and lay his information before us."

Harter frowned. "I'm not asking for identities,

Mr. Secretary," he began, "but do you believe this man completely reliable?"

"Absolutely, general," Barrison replied.

"Then, if he be correct, we are facing a serious situation," the general resumed. "Practically all our available military force is in Chihuahua and Sonora, and our fleet is in the Caribbean."

Monsel nodded. "And most of our crack airmen are with the army."

"There's only a garrison guard, and the coast artillery at San Francisco," Harter went on. "If any power should threaten — But good Lord, how could it? They'd have to get here first, and we'd have advices long beforehand."

"This government was to-day notified of the approach of the Japanese fleet," said the Secretary of War.

"Notified, yes," said Gethelds, breaking in for the first time. "But surely an attacking power would not notify."

"That," rejoined Barrison, "is the question. Would they?"

"Good God!" Monsel came to his feet. "You think, Mr. Secretary, that your man refers to Japan as a possible Mexican ally?"

"I hardly know what to think, Mr. Monsel," returned the Cabinet official. "I have the greatest faith in my man's shrewdness and good judgment, and I have to-day ordered and received an answer to an inquiry to the San Francisco authorities, which states that large numbers of Japanese have been coming into that city within the last few days."

"They naturally would, now that the main fruit-picking season is over, would they not?" queried Gotz,

who had joined the meeting on Barrison's invitation, because of his activities in the crisis which had arisen at the time of the California alien land laws agitation and his consequent knowledge of the local situations.

"They could very plausibly do so," admitted Barrison.

"Your son, the colonel, was ordered there yesterday," said Harter. "In view of this rather startling message, I think it would do no harm to instruct him to look about and gain volunteers for service among the various aviators in California in case of an emergency arising. As Monsel says, most of our men are with Carton, and only a few planes are at San Francisco."

Gotz nodded.

"Yes, you could do that," he agreed. "That would be all right. As for the rest of it, it looks to me like your man was scared worse than hurt, Barrison. Does he think the Japs are going to hit us from the east? They ain't fools. They can't take a country with a fleet and a few marines. The mere fact that they've split their fleet up, and sent half of it over here, proves they aren't going to start anything now."

"Yet if they did, we would be badly placed, we must admit. It would take a good while to get Carton out of Mexico, and longer still to mobilize the National Guards, and whip a volunteer force into shape. If they get a foothold on the country they could do incalculable damage before we could offer any major resistance." Harter scowled.

Gotz laughed.

"You boys are still playin' with th' same old bogey we talked about a year ago, ain't you?" he remarked.

Barrison frowned.

"It is preposterous, of course, to suppose that a nation intending war would notify us of its navy's approach. Yet we know how Japan began with Russia, without any warning whatever. My informant certainly has some grounds for his suspicion."

Gethelds cleared his throat.

"How would it do," he began, "to instruct Colonel Gotz to look out for these volunteer men, and take up all other strategic points upon which he may be able to pass, in order to be as well prepared as possible for instant action so soon as we are assured of the need?"

"Exactly," grunted Gotz; "but the whole world'll give us the laugh if Japan isn't really after our bacon."

"Just the same, if the chap in Mexico is right we've got to admit that she's jockeyed us into a nice position," Monsel grumbled. "It amounts to disarming the country, just about."

"The fleet could easily handle this one they are sending," said Seaton, speaking with a bit of asperity.

"It couldn't go east and west at the same time, though," Monsel retorted. "What if they hit us both sides at once?"

"From the reported tonnage in this fleet of theirs it would not require our entire force to meet it. The rest could go to the assistance of the Pacific squadron," Seaton suggested.

"My man will be brought to New Orleans on a fast dispatch boat," Barrison resumed. "Perhaps then we had better wait his arrival. You gentlemen will in the meanwhile give the suggested possibility your most earnest consideration."

Thus was lost the opportunity foreseen surely by *one* man for safeguarding the country. Had immedi-

ate action been taken, perhaps the result had differed. Who knows?

It was on the night of the 6th that the cable to Honolulu went suddenly out of commission, and repeated attempts to reach the islands by wireless failed. On the same night, or rather on the morning of the 7th, between two and three o'clock, a large schooner entered the Golden Gate, fell off in a most inexplicable manner, and grounded amid the shoals on the city side of old Fort Winfield Scott.

Hardly had she struck when her decks became black with men. She sent up several rocket signals and began to lower boats.

The life-saving station at that point, noted for its treacherous drag of currents, immediately went to the rescue. Upon arrival of the lifeboats at the now heavily listed vessel's side, they discovered her to be manned and loaded with Japanese.

A petit officer explained hurriedly, in very pidgin English, that they had had engine trouble — that they were a vessel bound from Vancouver to Honolulu, and that they had put back to San Francisco for repairs. There was very little confusion in the rescue. The passengers and crew of the schooner behaved with admirable composure; and between their own and the station's boats the men were rapidly taken ashore, where they huddled and chattered to themselves while waiting for their comrades to be brought to land.

The vessel listed more and more, and hardly had the last boat-load been taken off, including the captain of the doomed craft, who insisted on being the last to leave, when she turned completely on her side.

If the life-saving crew expected to be gracefully thanked for their humane and heroic efforts, however,

they were doomed to a different fate. Hardly had the last boat emptied, when the men fell upon their rescuers without mercy. They died to a man, with practically no sound to mark their end.

The life-saving station stands on a flat beneath the higher ground of the Presidio reservation, and upon this almost level beach the huddled mass of Japanese straightened their lines and began to move forward. The hour of the night was in their favor.

Of the small garrison left at the Presidio, no one was moving but the sentries, and they, like the ill-fated life crew, had accepted the wreck as the accident it seemed.

Yet as the lines of landed men moved forward, each drew the barrel and stock of a modern rifle from his clothing, and deftly fitted them together; and two large objects landed from the ship's own boats under cover of the darkness and confusion were hastily disclosed as high-powered quick-fires, pulled forward by their crews.

They crept across the flats and began to mount the side of the hill toward the buildings of the fort. The challenge of the first sentry was the last word he uttered. Like an avalanche they rushed upon him and bore him down.

The crack of his rifle exploding stabbed the night with sound and flame. Like the life-saving crew, he died, and the silent lines swept on.

But the alarm had been given. Lights flared through the barracks of the little garrison. A bugle sang sharply in the night. One of the attacker's quick-fires had been dragged up the hill, and was now hauled forward.

As the lines of the awakened men began to form on the parade, the rapid fire opened upon them. The action was short, swift, sanguinary. The garrison, over-

whelmed, went down fighting to the last in a hopeless grapple with the unexpected foes who had sprung from the night.

The sound of the struggle was carried to the crowds of sightseers and merrymakers at the beach below Sutro Heights, and excited some laughing comments to the effect that some of the garrison must have come home drunk and be shooting up the post, so quick as that was the thing effected. Hearing of the affair, an editor on a morning paper telephoned to the post provost's office.

A voice answered him in perfect English and informed him that what had been heard was nothing but some night practice, recently ordered for testing the rapidity and efficiency of the men in responding to an unexpected call. The same voice also apprised and gave him the details of the wreck of the schooner and the landing of the Japanese.

Yet while the editor was speaking, a rocket suddenly shot up from the hills above the harbor fortifications, and burst in a dazzling, rayed sun of fire.

Fifteen minutes later a thunderous detonation shook the editor at his desk. He dashed to a window giving upon Market Street and throwing up the sash, looked out. A policeman stood in the middle of the thoroughfare, mouth open, gazing toward the east.

"What's the matter?" yelled the man in the window. "Hey, officer! What was that?"

The bluecoat seemed to come to life. "Th' ferry!" he gasped. "It blew up!" He began to run.

The editor shook his head and drew back from the window. He felt a bit bewildered. "The ferry blew up!" he repeated slowly. From the street came the sound of a rapidly clanging gong.

He darted back to the window in time to see a police ambulance dash by with its engine roaring. "There's something wrong here," he observed to himself, and fell back into custom. He ran into the local room. "Jackson, Rodney! The ferry's blown up! Get it! On the jump, now!" he shouted.

He went back to his desk. The clang of a fire apparatus added its voice to the uproar. He nodded as one who expected that. But he did not expect or understand a crackle as of firearms, which broke out to the east, south, and north.

At first it was faint, a mere suspicion in his ear, but later it grew in volume. Plainly some one was shooting. "What the devil!" he cried out irascibly. "Has this town gone on a jag?"

He rose and went back to the window. He could see the dull reflection from the east, denoting the burning ferry building already wrecked by an explosion. Some of the shooting seemed to come from that direction.

But there was other firing from the north up Kearney, and the south somewhere along Montgomery, as it sounded. He shook his head. He was growing more and more puzzled. A Valencia Street owl-car slid past, going east.

He distinctly saw the motorman looking intently ahead toward the red glow of fire. It seemed to him that the firing from the south was growing closer.

He heard some one dash into the local room. "War!" yelled a voice hoarse with excitement. "It's war, fellows! *It's the Japanese!*"

An uproar broke out. As he dashed toward the room beyond he heard the sound of overturned chairs and snarling exclamations. Then he was at the door looking out upon a room of shirt-sleeved men jamming to-

gether about Jackson, who stood pallid and panting, his hat gone, his hair disheveled, a tiny trickle of blood staining the chalklike pallor of his face beneath the flaring lights.

The editor sprang forward. "What is it?" he questioned.

"The Japs," gasped Jackson. "They've seized the Presidio. They've blown up th' ferry to cut travel from Oakland. They've killed the police and the firemen who came up first. There's a bunch of them up on California, and more down on Montgomery. They're marching to the Presidio to join the others out there now. They killed Rodney and I guess they nicked me, from the feel of my head."

The editor forced him into a chair.

"Stuart!" he bawled. "Write it while Jackson talks. Get a move on." He turned and ran back to his room, and looked out of the window.

At the junction of Kearney and Market he could see a squadron of police drawn up, their center resting on the bronze column of Lotta's fountain. The firing from the south was louder, and he could hear the sounds of cheering. As he watched, a human wave boiled from the mouth of Montgomery and bore down on the police.

The officers lifted their weapons and fired.

Men went down, but their fellows came on undismayed. A great cry rose from their throats. "Banzai!" they yelled and fell on the blue line by the fountain. Like tigers they dragged them down and killed and rushed onward up Kearney. "Good God!" gasped the man at the window, and drew back, shaken.

He sat down at his desk, took a sheet of paper and wrote a "head" for Jackson's story. "Japanese Seize Presidio. Local Japs Rise to Aid of Their Fellows.

Ferry Blown Up. Fighting in Streets of San Francisco." He hesitated a moment, and then above this he wrote in heavy pencil, scrawling the caption: "War! War! War!"

Fresh yells and renewed shooting came from the streets. A heavy pounding broke on his ears. Later it developed that a gunboat had crept down from the navy yard, had been fired upon by the harbor guns, and driven back.

The editor sat on waiting for Stuart to bring him his story. A bullet from the street struck the frame of the open window, ricochetted into the room, and struck again with a dull, muffled spat. The editor's head dropped forward upon his desk.

His blood stained the page where he had written the three times repeated "War!"

Meanwhile the wireless station had been seized and wrecked by the resident Japanese, and all wires to the east, north, and south were cut by preconcerted arrangement, upon the signal of the sun-ray rocket. Strange scenes were enacted in the streets of the proud mistress of the Golden Gate, while aliens fought their way westward to join their brothers in possession of the fortifications, and others from the towns on the peninsula to the south moved north, destroying the railroad as they advanced, leaving a smoking trail of burning homes and the slaughtered bodies of men, women, and children in their wake.

The police and firemen fought to stem the tide rolling westward.

Denizens of the underworld, night owls of the city, citizens awakened by the conflict, joined them and fought shoulder to shoulder. Yet the slant-eyed masses moved forward. Ere they came to California they had been

given their military training, and they had been warned and instructed in advance for this moment.

They were casting not only their own lives, but those of thousands of their countrymen on the fall of the dice this night. Many died, but the rest went on toward the north and west. It was estimated broadly that morning saw more than five thousand men gathered within the limits of the Presidio Reservation.

Meanwhile Stuart finished his transcription of Jackson's story, gathered up the sheets and took them to the editor's room, where the editor's head lay upon the blood-stained sheet of paper. His cry brought the others crowding in and about the desk where the dead man sat.

By right of priority Stuart lifted the head gently and removed the written caption. The pencil locked in the dead man's fingers rattled flatly upon the desk.

Stuart held up the page to the wide eyes of the others. "Spent bullet from the window," he said shortly. "He had just finished this. Well, here goes!"

He wrapped the life-dampened sheet about his handful of copy, and jammed all into a pneumatic tube.

"We'll get out the paper. It was what he wanted," he said. "And wait a minute, fellows. I wonder if anybody's tried to get in touch with the outer towns. I guess this burg is grabbed, but how about the others?" He lifted a receiver from a telephone hook and waited, until a scared voice answered his signal.

"Get me long distance," he directed, and waited again. Again a woman's shaken voice replied. "Get me Oakland," he required.

"I can't. The line's not working," said the voice at the other end.

"Berkeley then — San José, Sacramento?" snapped Stuart.

"I can't," said the invisible girl. "There's something wrong."

"You bet there is," growled the man. "Aren't any of your trunks in order, Central?"

"No, sir. They seem to be cut, or down — or — something."

"All right," said Stuart less sharply. "Be a good girl and buck up. Stick to your board and don't get scared." He hung up and turned to his fellows. "We're cut off completely. They've done one good job. I thought it was funny we'd had no bother with calls since this happened. Wonder what the devil's wrong that the ships at Mare Island don't get busy? If I had a motor I'd go up and find out."

"Might pick up one at Lynch's wharf," suggested one of the men beside him. "That is if they haven't been picked up already."

Stuart nodded. "I'll try it. Who's game to go along?"

"Me," said Jackson, who had made his way in with the rest.

"Come on, then."

Stuart rose. They made their way down to the street, now deserted of all save the dead and wounded around the fountain, and set off along Market toward the water-front. In front of the ruined and smoldering ferry building they turned south and made their way to the wharf, where boats and launches were kept for rental.

There, by good fortune, they found a motor launch bobbing idly at the landing, and hastily let themselves down into its pit. No one questioned their action, and

Jackson settled himself rather weakly at the wheel, while Stuart turned over the engine and cast off.

As the launch backed out and turned clear of the pier heads they both cried aloud. For the first time they had a clear view of the Oakland side of the bay, and they both marked the lurid light of fires, stretching far above that city.

"Oakland, too," gasped Jackson. "Good Lord, Stu! How far does this thing go?"

Stuart, tuning his engine, shook his head. "I don't know," he muttered.

The bay was quiet, and he turned the motor wide open. They shot down the bay, a black streak, with a white tail of foam. So in the gray of the morning they came to Mare Island and found such vessels of war as were gathered there, trailing long streamers of smoke from their stacks, their crews stripping them for action.

The gunboat which had crept down and been fired upon had returned and set the entire place to buzzing.

"Something doing pretty soon, Jack," said Stuart, nodding to the vessels. He throttled down and slid into a landing. The two men went ashore and asked for Commandant Raymond's quarters, without delay.

And while the gray dawn broke, the city awoke to a surprising situation. While there had been fighting in the streets, it was only where the police had sought to check what at first they believed to be a form of anti-race riot.

Throughout the major portion of the city there had been but little disturbance. Many knew nothing of it till morning. The Japanese slipped out of their boarding houses singly, and by twos and threes, and slid silent as ghosts to their rendezvous. Only in the downtown sections, where the congestion made their move-

ments incapable of concealment, was there any trouble.

Thus it was that the city awoke to find herself dominated by the guns of the very fortifications built to defend her, and a messenger waiting at the doors of her mayor with an ultimatum demanding her surrender.

His honor, roused from slumber hours before, had gathered his associates about him, and spent the time in planning their best course for the coming day. Now he read the communication to them in a voice which shook and broke:

To the Mayor and the Civic Government, who have
until the present day administered the affairs
of the city of San Francisco:

Most Honorable and Illustrious Excellencies:

It is with the deepest sympathy for your position that you are hereby called upon to surrender your city to overwhelming circumstances. You can see at a glance, that having in our possession the forts of your harbor, we are in a position to spare or destroy.

We are therefore inspired from a desire to obviate needless slaughter to suggest that if no resistance is made we will guarantee property and life of all citizens preserving order. The alternative we do not wish to contemplate, as it involves destruction and an appalling loss of life. We would suggest further that you remain in office until such time as our fleet arrives which we expect at latest to-night, and that in the meantime all public services and utilities be operated as heretofore.

Upon the arrival of the commander of our armies with the fleet, martial law will be proclaimed for a time, and all public services taken over by our corps of efficient engineers. Therefore, for the sake of the people entrusted to your care, we demand instant and unconditional surrender.

ITO SAMATA,

Commanding forces at Presidio Forts.

With tears in his eyes the mayor laid down the communication and turned to his companions.

"Gentlemen: Five hundred thousand lives depend upon our answer," he began, and choked. "God knows what it means to advise it, but I see nothing for us save compliance! As you know, we are cut off from all outside communication by rail, by wire or boat. In the name of humanity, what can we do but submit and await for the nation to which we belong, to deliver the final answer?"

While the gray light struggled into the room where they sat, and mixed in a sickly radiance with the glow of the electrics, the pale-faced men of the city's affairs voted to submit. Later in the morning small squads of Japanese began to patrol the streets.

And so it came that the city believed to be impregnable from attack was captured while she slept — not by force of arms, but by an overwhelming strategy.

CHAPTER VII

A BATTLE IN THE CLOUDS

As Stuart and Jackson preferred their request for an interview with Commandant Raymond, an aëroplane darted up with a roaring motor, rising from the navy yard grounds and gliding off to the south and west — an air scout going forth to feel the position in advance of the war-ships, waiting orders to sail.

A marine hurrying past directed the two men from the city to the commandant's quarters, and a sentry on guard without them called quickly to an orderly within. A moment found them in the presence of the assembled officers of the several vessels and Raymond himself.

A tense atmosphere pervaded the room. Every face turned to the new arrivals as they came in and paused.

Raymond spoke at once. "You come from San Francisco?"

"Yes, sir," said Jackson. Stuart nodded.

"And what word do you bring?"

"The Japs hold the Presidio. They beached a schooner full of their men and rushed the garrison in the dark. A lot of Japs from the city have joined them. Oakland was burning as we came up, and all wires are down on our side."

"All wires are down from here, too," said Raymond, and turned to the naval men about him. "Gentlemen: If what these men say is true, the enemy hold the city at their mercy unless we can dislodge them. This con-

firms what we suspected from the report of Commander Hodges, after he was fired upon last night."

"And the story will be confirmed or disproven soon now," said Colonel Gotz, who was present. "One of our men just started on a scout flight, by my orders. When he returns we will know about the forts."

Raymond brought a fist down upon his desk.

"We've got to get them back," he growled with savage avowal. "We can attack them from the land with our marines and what men in the city will volunteer to follow — and there'll be a lot. We can attack after the fleet has engaged from the water."

He whirled on Jackson and Stuart.

"Will one or both of you return and bear a message from me to the mayor, asking him to call for volunteers, and in his inability to communicate with the Governor of this State, to request the National Guardsmen in the city to act in conjunction with our marines? And, gentlemen"—to the ships' officers—"return to your vessels and be ready to move as soon as the scout returns. And, remember: We must have those forts back before the Jap fleet arrives, as it undoubtedly will — or we must be in our graves. I myself shall go to the city to take charge of the land movement. I will ask for your launches to transport the marines. Engage them hotly and cover our attack as long as you can, at no matter what cost. You understand?"

Quite gravely the men about the room inclined their heads. The challenge of the sentry at the door broke the quiet. Instantly a man's voice was heard shouting the name of Gotz.

"Orderly, open the door," directed the colonel.

There appeared on the threshold a lieutenant of the aviation corps, who brought his hand to salute. "Col-

onel," he cried quickly as he strode forward, "Farrel is coming back, I think. Two other planes seem to be pursuing and firing upon him."

Gotz came to his feet. "The devil!" he rasped. "They must have aviators among them, then. They've taken the planes at the fort and gone up."

He turned and hurried from the room, the lieutenant at his heels. As by one accord the others rose also and followed, pausing outside to stand with lifted faces, gazing into the south and west.

There as they gazed three reddish brown streaks appeared, growing swiftly larger; one far in advance and two driving along behind it. From the latter came now and then a hazy puff of vapor, quickly whipped away by the wind.

With incredible swiftness they came on and grew larger until the dull rattle of the leader's motor made a staccato whir in the dizzy heights where it swirled in the straightaway, banked and circled in a great spiral, like a monstrous sea-gull on outstretched wing. The chatter of the engine died and the biplane dipped and swooped earthward, volplaning back to its home, to alight in a sliding run close by the men who had rushed to meet it.

Farrel, the aviator, flung himself from his seat and cast a look up and back from where he had come. Forgetting all discipline for the moment, he burst out in a frantic vituperation. "Damn them! They picked me up as soon as I passed Sausalito. I tried to beat around 'em, but they headed me off. All I could do was come back, but gimme a bomb or two and an assistant and I'll go get 'em — th' yellow sneaks."

"Look out, everybody!" cried Gotz, gazing aloft and spreading his arms in a backward, sweeping gesture.

He began to walk slowly back, keeping his eyes turned upward.

The planes which had pursued Farrel had continued their flight and now hovered directly above the navy yard. From each fluttered the sun-ray flag of Japan. Just before Gotz spoke one of them cast over something which fell spinning downward, at first as a mere tiny speck, dark against the sky.

As the officers clustered about Farrel's machine followed the direction of the colonel's gaze, they caught sight of the falling object.

"Bomb, eh?" snarled Raymond in the tone of one saying how do you do to a lifelong foe.

With a thud the missile hit the ground. For a moment no one spoke or moved or seemed to breathe. Then Farrel laughed harshly and started toward it. "Missed fire," he snarled.

"Look out for a time-fuse," cautioned the colonel.

The aviator shook his head, walked over and lifted the unexploded shell. Then he laughed again, more lightly. "Parcel post by air-ship. The joke's on us," he said. He walked back and handed the object to Raymond.

It was an ordinary brass cartridge, such as are used in the smaller armament of war-ships, from which the shell had been removed. Across the open end a bit of cloth had been securely wired.

Raymond tore off the cloth and thrust his fingers inside. He withdrew a rolled cylinder of paper and stretched it before his eyes, extended between his hands. As he read his face flushed darkly and gradually faded and paled to a haggard whiteness.

When he had finished he turned and without any words of comment reread it aloud:

" To the Commander of the Mare Island Navy Yard,
and the Officers in command of such vessels
of the United States Pacific Squadron as may
be stationed in San Francisco Bay.

" SIRS:

" The city of San Francisco lies beneath the guns of the Presidio forts, as you doubtless know at this time. The mayor and his advisers have surrendered in order to save property and life. To you we desire to announce that his acceptance of our demands will assure complete protection to the citizens unless action on your part compels our further course.

" Should you accept the pacific course, no material harm will come to the city, and its conquest will be bloodless, but upon the first movement of your vessels to leave their moorings we shall open fire upon the city. We desire further to inform you that the same stratagem used by us last night was operative in Los Angeles, San Diego, San José, Santa Cruz, Fresno, Monterey, Santa Barbara, and the smaller cities in the region involved. You can therefore perceive the futility of any minor resistance on your part, which would almost inevitably result only in the destruction of the city and the needless sacrifice of your vessels and men.

" Should you elect a humane course, you will at once break from the halyards of your flagship such flags as translated from the International Signal Code indicate, 'We understand.' Our aviators will remain above you until they see such signals or the reverse. Thereafter you will prepare to surrender your vessels to our fleet, whose wireless signals are now affecting the Presidio station quite plainly.

" If you do not accept our proposition our aviators will return and we will immediately open fire upon the city, at the same time instructing our patrols now in its streets to fire it at every available point. This will be done by prearranged signal in order to gain immediate action. It

is our intention to wage civilized warfare in every sense, in which we trust you will deem fit to coöperate.

"ITO SAMATA,
"Commanding forces at Presidio Forts."

During that reading no man spoke, or in other way interrupted.

Hodges, the commander of the little gunboat which had been fired upon by the forts, was the first to break the silence. "Surrender without firing a shot?" he cried. "I'd rather be dead and forgotten than remembered like that!"

Raymond rolled up the paper and replaced it mechanically in the brass cartridge, patting it into position with an attention to exactitude indicative of a dazed mental condition. "So would I," he said slowly, staring at the metallic case in his hands. "So would I, Hodges. But it isn't just our right to choose—I guess."

"You mean the city, of course?" questioned a ship's captain.

"Yes." Raymond pointed upward where the two planes from the Presidio were circling slowly—watching like great birds of prey above a stricken lion. "These planes are waiting for our answer. They can outrun our fastest boat, and if we refuse to give in, they could fire the city before we could bring a gun into action."

Farrel spoke up; "Send up all the planes, sir. We've got five. We'll get those fellows, and then go over the forts and give them a few bombs to keep them busy."

Raymond shook his head.

"Those works are practically bomb proof, Mr. Far-

rel, and such action would only draw down their vengeance on the helpless folk of the city. Gentlemen, it seems to me that our duty calls for a personal sacrifice more bitter than the chances of battle. If we yield, we shall yield as men of honor, and not break our word when given. Gentlemen, what is your answer? Do we accept, or risk all on one cast at once?"

Hodges opened his lips. "For myself, as I said, I had rather die," he said thickly. "For the sake of the helpless, we must yield."

Raymond bowed his head. "So be it. God grant we be understood by some, when they say later that we were afraid." He called his orderly and spoke to him briefly.

The man saluted and darted away in the direction of the landing slip. Ten minutes later a string of gay colored bunting broke from the signal halyards of one of the smoke belching cruisers. At its appearance, one of the circling planes above Mare Island straightened from its spirals and darted away into the south and west.

The men about Raymond stood with bowed heads. Raymond's hand darted to his sword hilt, wrenched out the weapon, and flashed it aloft in an edged salute to the one remaining plane. Then, seizing it in both his hands, he broke it across his knee and threw the fragments on the ground.

Without a word he bowed his head and walked back to his quarters.

He sat down and drew a sheet of paper before him, took up a pen, and began to write: "I have surrendered this position in the name of humanity, to avert from helpless thousands the death which threatened. Let none judge of my actions till such time as he face

a similar situation. In the eventual victory of this nation I have no doubt. To die for one's country is sweet. I prefer that death I sought to turn from others."

Five minutes later his orderly, white-faced and gasping, rushed from the door of Raymond's quarters and cried to the first man he met that the commandant had shot himself and was lying with a bullet through his brain.

All day the Japanese aëroplanes spun in circles of air above Mare Island, flying in relays, going and coming from the Presidio forts, keeping an eye on the vessels from whose funnels the smoke no longer poured. They contented themselves with mere observation, but their presence irked the men who gathered in little knots below them, and talked in low tones of the events of the night and morning, of things to come in the future, and of Raymond's death.

The day dragged by.

In the city it was quiet. It was a dreadful day in the south of the State. Later it was known what had happened. At that time each section alone knew of its fate, and could only surmise that of others. Yet the Japanese rose the same night in all the southern counties and attacked the whites.

For years they had been waiting and preparing. In many communities they actually outnumbered the whites, and they all rose at once. Laboring in the fields as pickers of fruit and hops, as gardeners, as railroad navvies, as servants in houses and hotels, they were in reality men sent over to work and wait for a purpose, men who had carried arms and knew how to use them, and did not fear to die for Nippon.

It was a night of alarms; of the trooping of armed men; of sudden assault and a desperate defense in some

quarters; of slaughter and burning, and rapine beyond description.

Half of the city of Los Angeles alone was destroyed by fire, and while it burned the conquerors patroled its streets and shot down those who fled the flames. Against their organized might the unsuspecting citizens of the State were a demoralized rabble during those few, first dreadful hours.

In the cities, women of culture and refinement knelt in smoke-filled rooms and loaded weapons for men, until the roofs fell above them in smoking ruin and death. At Los Angeles a number of exhibition aviators sent up their planes and dropped hastily improvised bombs of dynamite, wrapped into bundles with twine and equipped with fuses.

In the morning they were still flying, and they continued until their fuel was exhausted, when they dropped here and there, and met what fate awaited. Some of them were torn to pieces by the men they had fought through the darkness; some few escaped for a time; some got clear away and told their story days later to a detail-hungry nation.

And while the aëroplanes from the Presidio patroled the navy yard with watchful eyes, Colonel Gotz sat in his quarters and drew meaningless circles and scrolls on a bit of paper. He was thinking, and his thoughts were unpleasant.

A scowl marked his always saturnine face.

"Damn it!" he broke out at length, speaking to himself; "this is a mess. Dad thought it couldn't be done, and yet look at the thing. They couldn't land an army, he said. Oh, not at all. Yet look at what's happened. What's to prevent their landing?"

He stepped to the door and called to a marine, walk-

ing dejectedly past. Him he directed to request the members of the aviation squad to report at once. He went back and flung himself into his chair, and began his aimless drawing again.

His men came to him — five slender, wire-tense figures, in the uniform of the service, and with them five others, their assistants, who rode with them and, in case of need, would handle the bombs. They entered, saluted, and stood at attention. Gotz waved them to chairs. "Sit down," he said.

"We're useless here," he went on when they were seated, "and we might be of no small service elsewhere. Just where we can go safely I don't know, but I believe that Sacramento is probably still in our hands. The percentage of Japs in that district is smaller — mostly a few hop pickers. I do not believe that they could put anything like this over up there."

"To-night, therefore, I am going to leave here in the largest plane and try to reach that city. We can get up under cover of the dark, and if we can slip by those fellows we'll have a straight course. If I get through I will communicate with Washington at once and report what has happened here. In the light of what has occurred, this seems the only course open. After I leave I would suggest that the rest of you rise at half-hour intervals and follow. I shall take Farrel with me. If, as I imagine, they pursue us, the rest of you should get away easy."

Farrel swore with feeling. "I'm only sorry we ain't going the other way, but I guess this is the right thing, sir. How would it do, sir, if th' last two of th' planes to leave here should sort of keep along with th' marines an' jackies, an' act as scouts for their column?"

Gotz nodded. "The very thing," he decided.

They rose, saluted, and left him. He sat on, thinking. Not strangely, his mind was far away from the present, in the city of Washington itself, engrossed with a girl. So, by natural association, the name of Stillman came into his mind, and with it the strange aerial destroyer he had offered to turn over to the nation.

Colonel George Gotz frowned in an indefinite fashion.

"I wonder," he muttered—"I wonder just what Bernice thought of that chap? She wasn't the same after he left, and I don't believe she was miffed over that motor affair. I wonder what one of his ships would do in a case like this? Hang it! I believe it could do the whole thing, if it was anything like dad said it was. Why"—he brought his hand down on the table at which he sat—"why, dad was afraid of it, and dad's no fool—or he wasn't. In this thing—I don't know. I wonder where Stillman went to? Oh, good Lord!"

The afternoon wore on. Gradually the news of what was to the fore spread among the men of the yard. They gathered in little groups, and talked in subdued voices, and cast glances toward the hangars of the aviation men.

Inside the hangars, the men of the squad and their assistants worked over the machines, testing, examining, proving each brace and stay, and the compression and feed of motors; oiling, filling fuel tanks to the last possible drop of holding, loading baskets with the nitro bombs, which they might desire to use.

Night came down with a cloudy sky, in which a moon played hide and seek.

Gotz rose, donned puttees and leather coat and cap, and placed his goggles in his pocket. He left his quarters, and walked quickly to the hangars. Already their

doors were open. He gave the word to wheel out the great Curtiss biplane, which he intended to use.

Under the urge of many hands it trundled out, its great vanes tilting slightly as they hauled and tugged it into position. Little Farrel came to the colonel's side and reported all as ready.

The colonel nodded and spoke to Larkin, the slender young lieutenant who had brought the word of the Japanese planes that morning when they chased Farrel back.

"Larkin, I am leaving you in command of the three planes which will go with the marines' and sailors' columns. After Farrel and I go up, give us thirty minutes, and then send the other after us. He had better go to the north, I think, rather than follow our course, and swing around later toward Sacramento, when he's sure he is clear. Farrel and I will try and handle these fellows above us, if they spot us. You understand?"

"Yes, sir." Larkin saluted.

"All right, then, and good luck," said Gotz.

He turned, waved a hand to the group of naval officers who had come to watch his departure, walked to the plane, and climbed to the pilot's seat. The men of the squad laid hold of the biplane, and braced themselves to withstand the drag of her propeller.

Farrel seized the blades of ash and twisted them with a quick wrenching motion, leaping back. The bark of the motor rose suddenly through the tense quiet. A swirling cloud of dust grew behind the machine. Farrel ran around and leaped quickly to his place behind Gotz. He wore a light rifle of high power strapped to his back.

"All ready, sir!" he cried.

"Let go!" Gotz threw his levers.

The biplane darted forward from the restraining hands, its vane stilted; it lifted its nose and began to climb the long night-darkened hill of air beyond the watchers. The roar of its motor still chattered above their faint cheer. It was gone.

The colonel had chosen a moment for his start when the moon was completely veiled.

He let the plane rush forward, steadily rising, until well up, it swung and began to mount still higher in a giant spiral. The air whistled and sang among the braces of the biplane. Farrel sat tight and with keen eyes swept the night skies, keeping a sharp lookout for the Japanese planes, which had hovered all day.

The aneroid marked a thousand feet, and the moon was just silvering the edge of its veiling clouds when something like a moving shadow caught his eye. His sibilant hiss of warning reached the colonel's ear. Quite easily he brought the plane about and straightened out, flying off to the north and east.

The shadow followed, dimly perceived by Farrel, who crouched in his seat, watching and reporting.

Like a great bat it wheeled and came on in pursuit of the biplane. He turned his head and cried the news to his colonel, turned back, and resumed his watch. The moon came clear of its cloud and showed the spidery outline of the pursuing plane, its vanes silvered into things of gauze in the light, its pilot a dark blot in its front, like the head of a dragon fly.

The purr of the Curtiss lessened, the speed with which she flew before slackened.

The man at Gotz's back jerked his head around in silent interrogation. The pursuing plane crept up. Slowly a second cloud was creeping over the moon.

The light was growing paler. A red spurt of flame

darted from the hostile aëroplane, spitting forward like a breath of menace.

On the instant Farrel heard Gotz cry out, felt the Curtiss tip until he clung with both hands to retain his position, and found himself hurtling through space on a reeling thing of rods and stays.

Yet the motor purred on, and it came to Farrel that this was not the swirling fall of uncontroll, but the dizzy dash of purpose. As though to justify his faith, the slant of the descent lessened, came swiftly to a level, wheeled in a long, easy spiral, and led them to the south, yet so close to the dark mass of the earth that he could dimly perceive the undulations of its surface, of sand dunes, and wind twisted bushes above which they flitted like a monstrous night-shape in a dream.

Gotz's voice came back to him:

"Dodged him. Now, if the moon keeps under, maybe he'll think his chance-shot got us." With tilted vanes the Curtiss began once more to climb.

But the moon was fickle. Once more its light flooded the air across which they jockeyed for position. Off to the north the unfriendly machine which had threatened whirled about in hurried seeking for its lost chase.

As Gotz swung east it, too, turned in a long slant aimed to intercept him. The colonel swore tensely and spoke again. "I'm going close to that chap, Farrel. Have a try at him with your rifle. Ready, now."

As Farrel unslung his weapon and pumped a cartridge up he advanced his spark and opened up his motor. In a roaring charge the biplane swept to meet its aerial foe. Incredibly swift was that rush to an angry meeting.

Farrel crouched at his pilot's back, saw the outlines of the Jap's plane sweep up to meet him. His rifle

came up, and he fired at the man bent in the driving seat of the hostile craft.

Yet even as he fired he knew by instinct that he had missed, and jerked in another shell and fired, and fired again. In that uncertain light, on the swaying seat of the Curtiss, it was almost chance shooting. •

His bullets went wild.

Again, when the Japanese machine loomed in what seemed inevitable collision, the plane to which he clung dipped toward the dark mass of the earth and rushed downward, as Gotz evaded that meeting in mid air. For a sickening instant they seemed dashing to certain death, righted once more and began to climb in a long, easy sweep.

Gasping, Farrel looked for their pursuer, and found him behind and below them, where he had followed that earthward rush.

He was mounting, even as they were, his vanes flowing with the moonlight, his shadow thrown beneath him in widely distorted outline on the earth. He left his seat and threw himself face downward on the plane, beside the motor, and from there he fired downward on the plane below. He became conscious, as he stopped to reload, that his colonel was speaking.

"There's another one behind and higher up. We'll have trouble dodging them both. Get into your seat, Farrel, and hang on. I'm going to show this first chap a Yankee trick."

Without question he wriggled back to his place and gripped hold. Gotz whirled the Curtiss around in a turn so short that for an instant the great vanes stood in a nearly perpendicular line, brought her upright, and started back down the moonlighted hill of air which they had climbed.

In the swoop of a vulture he rushed downward, the air singing a sibilant harmony about the tense stays of the plane. Farrel caught a glimpse of the Jap plane turning to evade that desperate assault, then, with an elastic yet rending impulse the Curtiss struck her foe one terrible blow with her middle and lower part.

Well nigh hurled from his seat, Farrel clung through a throbbing instant of time, beaten out by the snarling chatter of the two motors, then with a wrench and a stagger the biplane he rode tore itself free, shuddered and swung upward.

Beneath them he saw the other, one of its vanes broken and swinging, go swirling in unguided course, dropping downward. A moment and it turned completely over and fell turning and twisting to its doom.

"Got him!" hissed the colonel, sending the Curtiss eastward again. A fierce jubilation rang in his tones.

"My God!" panted little Farrel, "that was the—the—the darndest thing I ever expect to see, colonel. My God, what a chance!"

"It got by," said Gotz with a chuckle. "I fancy that other chap will keep his distance after that. Where is he now—I've lost him."

Farrel strained his eyes across the light-flooded heavens to find the other plane. "Maybe it was one of ours," he suggested.

"No," said Gotz shortly. "We've been up only ten minutes."

"Ten—" began Farrel and paused. The plane he searched for had darted from the screening background of a cloud, against which he had up to now failed to see it.

"There it is to the south and west," he announced

and paused again to break out almost at once in an excited shout. "Colonel, the lights — all along the horizon to the west! They're search-lights, colonel; long ribbons — five, ten, twenty —"

"They're the Japanese fleet," said Gotz, snarling the comment. "Well, all they've got to do is land." He sent the biplane forward in a savage rush.

So they fled away, while Farrel with turned head watched now the pursuing plane, now those streamers and ribbons of light on the far horizon, shifting and changing, waxing and dying, like the ghost-lamps of the northern lights.

The moon bathed all the landscape or hid herself behind the clouds, but always the plane which pursued them came on, and ever those search-light pencils played along the horizon like a mighty fan, above the progress of the Japanese fleet.

Half an hour passed — forty-five minutes.

They flew above the vast Suisun marshes, beside the Sacramento River, before he spoke to Gotz. "Slow down a bit, colonel, and give me a chance at that fellow back there. Let me try just a shot or two at him — just one or two."

The colonel made no answer, but the burr of the motor lessened, the speed of the biplane slackened. Behind he could see the other plane creep up.

Stretched beside and below the motor, on the lower wing, he lay and watched the intervening distance lessen, until of a sudden flame spat toward him and a bullet sang close at hand. He threw up his rifle and fired back, shot after shot, till his magazine was empty, swore at his failure and reloaded, shoved out the rifle and waited.

Of a sudden the Curtiss rode on steady wing and the

dark figure of the Jap pilot leaped into line with his sights.

His finger pressed the trigger, and even as the pungent smell of the powder struck his nostrils the man he had aimed at sagged forward above his controls. The plane he guided staggered in drunken fashion, darted sidewise, turned quite over, and spun over and over, down to its moonlight grave in the marsh.

"Go as far as you like," said Farrel, edging back to his station. "That fellow's done for, unless he's a fish."

A faint point of light grew on the horizon. Gotz jerked his head forward. "The light of the capitol dome," he advised shortly.

They rushed on. Little by little the light grew plainer, until the whole glowing golden dome of the California State House lay before them and swept swiftly beneath.

Gotz shut off his motor and swung the plane in a gigantic sweep. Circling the light-starred roof below them, they slid down and came to a landing in the park in the capitol's rear.

Gotz climbed stiffly from his seat and turned to his companion. "From the amount of light in this place, they're open for business. I imagine we'll find the Governor inside. Come on in," said he.

CHAPTER VIII

PRESIDENT GILSON'S PROCLAMATION

EARLY on the morning of the 7th of October a messenger aroused Secretary of War Garrison, and handed him a wireless message in code. He departed and left the Cabinet official rubbing sleepy eyes, and fumbling his way into a dressing-gown before sitting down to translate the cryptic communication.

A faint dawn was just breaking as Garrison finally spread out his transcription on his desk, and gazed out of the window of his bedroom with a troubled face. As written down it was a matter of grave import which he confronted.

He turned back to his translation and read it again.

On Board Destroyer, Hornet.
At sea, en route New Orleans.

Sec'y of War BARRISON,
Washington, D. C.

SIR:

For God's sake recall fleet from Vera Cruz and order to intercept Japanese fleet now reported in neighborhood of Azores. Have definite information at last. Great trouble in getting to coast explains delay.

Am certain of approach from west of Japanese fleet supposed to be in home waters. Was mobilized at Yezo six weeks ago and equipped to war footing. Sailed by far northern route. Have reason to believe it equipped at Yezo with new and very potential weapon in nature of

aërial bomb—exact character unknown. Believe will attack Honolulu and San Francisco at about same time, to avoid news of approach preceding its arrival off Golden Gate.

Fleet in Atlantic probably equipped with new bomb before sailing last August. Many Japanese landed on coast of Gulf of California during past few months, mostly in neighborhood of Guaymas and Piedras near termination of railroad from Chihuahua. Estimate ten or twelve thousand. Suspect these to be trained men.

Get Carton out of Mexico at earliest possible moment. Mexican war a trick to divert our forces to unfavorable positions. Am proceeding to Washington at greatest possible speed. Expect arrive 10th at latest. Your action must precede my report.

H-Z No. 1.

As he finished reading, Barrison's lips came together with a snap. Rising, he threw off his robe and pajamas, and began dressing. In the midst of that he paused to ring for his secretary, and ordered him to call his motor.

By the time he had completed his toilet it was at the door. Without waiting for breakfast, Barrison went down.

Early as it was, he was determined to wait upon the President at once, and lay this matter before him. He entered the car, directed the driver to the White House, and settled back in his seat, his face grave and lined with the import of the message he carried.

It was from his secret agent in the City of Mexico — the same who four days previously had advised taking steps for defense — a man in whom he placed absolute confidence. Small wonder that he chafed at his progress, swift as it was, through the well-nigh empty streets of the waking city.

The car stopped at last before the portals of the Executive Mansion, and he climbed hastily out of the door, before the chauffeur could reach back to its catch. With a hand which trembled, he rang for admittance, and spoke to the sleepy doorman, who answered, urging him with the brief statement that he came on a matter of national moment.

While he waited with what patience he could command for the audience he asked, he fretted at each moment of delay. He paced slowly down the hall to the rear, where a long door gave a view of the eastern part of the city. The sun was rising and its light touched the tall spire of the monument in the mall and bathed it in a golden light.

Presently the doorman came back and informed him him that President Gilson would see him at once, turned and led him to the sleeping apartments of the nation's Executive head.

President Gilson had risen and thrown a robe about his night garments as Barrison came in. "Good morning, Mr. Secretary," he began.

"Good morning, Mr. President," Barrison responded. "Believe me, nothing short of a great peril could have brought me so early."

"Peril?" Gilson's voice rose sharply on the word.

"Yes." Barrison bowed, and extended his translation of the message from H-Z No. 1.

President Gilson took it, read it through in haste. When he had finished he lifted amazed eyes to Barrison's face. So for a tense moment the two men stood staring mutely. Then the President spoke:

"You credit this?"

"Yes. H-Z No. 1 is a dependable man."

"And you would advise?"

"Doing exactly what he suggests."

Gilson frowned. "That means abandoning the Mexican campaign, the calling of volunteers, the preparation for war on an extensive scale."

"God grant we have time to prepare," Barrison said.

"You believe it so urgent as that? I have faith in your judgment, Barrison. You think we should do these things?" Gilson paused.

"My presence is my best answer, Mr. President," the Secretary replied.

Gilson handed back the message, and stood for a moment wrapped in deep thought. "We had best get Secretary Ryan and Secretary Manuels of the navy," he began at length. "Part of your agent's recommendations will affect Manuel's department. Suppose you go to my office and phone to them both while I dress. Have you had breakfast?"

"No," said Barrison to the last. "Very well, I'll wait you in your office. Meanwhile I'll get what members of the strategy board I can reach by phone and arrange a meeting, with your sanction."

"As you think best. I will join you in ten minutes. You will breakfast here and wait for Ryan and Manuels."

Alone in the President's office, Barrison called up the Cabinet members, Ryan and Manuels, and conveyed the need of their immediate presence. Then he rang up Gethelds and told him to get word to his board associates and be ready to meet the three heads of departments on call.

He sat back and waited the coming of the President, rose when he entered, reported, and followed him to breakfast.

An hour passed, during which the two men discussed

the crisis which had arisen, before Secretary Ryan arrived. He came in quickly, his usually placid face flushed, and his eyes alight with excitement. Before the two who had waited his arrival could rise from their places, he cast another written slip of paper on the table between them.

"I received that just before starting," he began quickly. "Read it. It is from Jackson of California, as you will see. Gentlemen, one of our States appears to be assailed. We must consider means for her relief. I confess this comes as a decided shock to me. I can scarcely believe it true."

Barrison, near whose hand the slip had fallen, snatched it up and read its body aloud:

"Japanese throughout southern and western parts of State believed to have risen during night. All wire communications with larger centers cut off. Meager reports received indicate a general and concerted action upon the part of aliens. Fear larger cities are in a state of siege at least. Will mobilize all arms of National Guard, which may be available and await your instructions. Will undoubtedly require Federal aid to cope with situation.

"JACKSON, Governor."

"My God!" President Gilson straightened in his chair. His firm jaw set into new lines of resolve.

"There is no longer any question as to your man's correctness, Mr. Barrison," he declared. "This shows their hand. They have assured their ability to land an army upon our seaboard, if this is correct. Sir, I authorize you to recall Carton, with his entire force, and instruct him to be ready to operate against this very imminent danger. Mr. Ryan, we have no longer a theory, but a fact to face. We must act quickly. I

shall issue a proclamation this morning, requiring all States to furnish their militia for national defense —”

“Secretary Manuels!” announced the man at the door.

The Secretary of the Navy came in, caught a glimpse of the tense faces before him, and paused in the middle of his greeting. Gilson spoke:

“Mr. Manuels, you will at once issue an order to the fleet off Vera Cruz to proceed northward and intercept the Atlantic fleet of Japan, engage and destroy them unless otherwise ordered. Mr. Manuels, this nation faces a war with Japan, unless we are greatly mistaken.

Manuels started backward. “War? Recall the fleet? What of the Pacific coast?” he gasped.

“California is now largely in the hands of the native Japanese, who have risen,” said President Gilson. “Her defense must come now from the army. Your army must guard the east. Gentlemen, attend to your several duties. We meet with the board in one hour. I shall myself call it together, cancel all my appointments, and meet with you. We have waited too long, and been tricked by a subtle foe. Now we must act. I shall prepare my message to Congress inside the hour. That is all.” He turned and left the room, motioning Ryan to come with him.

Barrison and Manuels followed, left the White House, and made their way through the grounds toward the long gray face of the Army and Navy Building across the street, to the southwest. They mounted its steps and disappeared within, each to his own office, to set in motion the wheels which should see the President’s orders fulfilled.

From those offices, within the hour, went the messages which ordered the retreat of Carton and the sail-

ing of the fleet, and showed that at last the country recognized the trick of which she was the victim.

It was nine o'clock when the hastily summoned members of the board assembled jointly with the President and his Cabinet in the Army and Navy Building.

In his capacity of commander-in-chief, President Gilson called them to order, and briefly outlined the emergency which confronted, and the steps he had taken. "You have ordered the retirement of the Mexican armies, Mr. Barrison?" he inquired, turning to the Secretary of War.

"Yes, sir. I have also ordered a general message sent to all Governors of States to be prepared to mobilize their State troops on call."

"And you, Mr. Manuels?" Gilson continued.

"I have wirelessed the fleet, Mr. President."

"And I," said Ryan, "have, as you know, wired Governor Jackson for further information."

"And I would now further recommend the calling for volunteers and their immediate organization," the President went on; "also the issuance of orders to the several arsenals to prepare arms for shipment, and the giving of night and day orders to all ammunition and ordnance plants; also the instant arrangement with such railroads as may be required for the special movement of troops and supplies; also the declaration of a special national issue of bonds to furnish immediate funds for this emergency expense." He sat down. "Gentlemen, the meeting is now open to you all."

Harter, of the army, spoke: "I am in accord with the President's suggestions. It seems to me that we have now but to consider merely ways and means."

Secretary Ryan broke into the pause: "I, too, in

the main agree, but I cannot counsel the calling for volunteers. It appears to me that the State troops should be sufficient. As yet, but a portion of one State is affected. I cannot believe that a rabble of laborers, of Japanese coolies and navvies, can long dominate a civilized and admittedly courageous people. In the heat of the moment, I prefer to believe that Governor Jackson, who has long been notedly antialien, has magnified the situation. That is my reason in asking him for further details.

"A few wires may have been cut during purely local disturbances, and caused a temporary delay in the transmission of messages to Sacramento. When, however, Carton's army is withdrawn from the south, and reënforced by a few thousands of militia, I believe that they will soon sweep over this local condition."

"But," objected Barrison quickly, "if my man's suspicions are correct, they are about to land an army of trained soldiers on our Western shores. Further, Mr. Ryan, these men who rose last night are not an untrained rabble. They are men who have had army training — they are soldiers."

"Granting even that," Secretary Ryan replied, "is it conceivable that they, or the army about to be landed, can penetrate the country to any great extent? I do not believe it. Grant that, in the end, they have an army of a hundred thousand. Carton's forces and the State troops should prove more than their match. My recommendation would be to mobilize, say fifty thousand of the National Guard and rush them West at once to coöperate with Carton."

Monsel, of the aviation corps, entered the discussion. "What, sir, of this new weapon — this aerial bomb?" he asked Barrison.

"I do not know," the secretary replied.

"The idea is dangerous," said the aviator, speaking at large. "Provided the thing is effective, it might enable a small force, so equipped, to practically annihilate an army of ten times its size. We will need men, and we ought to get them now."

Secretary Ryan flushed.

"I am advocating what I deem sufficient preparation," he returned stiffly. "I told President Gilson that we must prepare for defense, this morning, as Garrison will remember, but I do not believe in being carried away by excitement. It is possibly true that something serious has happened in California — long a menace of the peace of this nation — a State which has on several occasions caused tension with Japan.

"At the same time, we do not certainly know that there is any war outside of the boundaries of that State. There has been no declaration of war. I would call your attention to the fact that the Japanese ambassador has not asked for his passports, and is still in Washington."

"Is he?" said Garrison shortly, as from sudden impulse. "Suppose we find out about that." He rose and walked to the door of the room, spoke to the guard, and came back to his chair. "You will recall, Mr. Secretary," he resumed, "that an act of war may establish the fact, as well as the declaration. I cite you the Russo-Japanese episode, which began with a naval attack on the Russian squadron. If the rising and seizure of cities by Japanese subjects is not an act of war, what is it?"

"Perhaps a purely local manifestation of racial differences, with wrong on both sides," said Ryan.

A rap fell on the door. Monsel sprang up in his

nervous way, and answered. He returned with a telegraph form in his hands. "For you," he remarked, as he handed it to the Secretary of War. "They sent it on from your office."

Spreading it out, Barrison read it through, tightened his lips, and turned once more to Ryan.

"Mr. Secretary, if you wish further confirmation, I can give it," he announced sharply. "This is from General Carton, in the field. Gentlemen, and Mr. President, it says:

"Army of Occupation, in Field, Out of Ojo de
Aqua, Chihuahua.

"I have to report that during the night of the sixth an attack was made upon the forces occupying this position by the Mexican army, supported by a strong force of Japanese. There can be no doubt of the nature of this fact, in that, after the engagement, the bodies of numerous Japanese in the uniforms of their own national army corps, were discovered upon the field.

"They appear to be regulars of the Japanese infantry, fully equipped and armed for active service. As I send this day is breaking and my air-scouts report large masses of troops, plainly not Mexican from their manner of movement, as coming up in our front. Expect a general engagement some time during the day. A scout has just reported a hostile aëroplane as rising inside the enemy's camp.

"CARTON,

"Commanding U. S. Forces in Northern Mexico."

"Score one more count for the unknown H-Z 1," said Monsel grimly. "Who the devil is he, Barrison?"

The Secretary of War twisted the message he held in his fingers. "I may as well tell you," he answered slowly. "You will all meet him on the tenth. H-Z 1 is known to you all as Harold Darling. He is the

brightest man in his place I have ever chanced to meet."

Gethelds, who had sat silent throughout the discussion, started. "That boy!" he exclaimed. "Why — why I thought — "

"What every one was wont to think, colonel," Garrison cut in with a faint smile. "His chief value lay in the fact that he was thought to be an idler. In reality he is a valuable man to his country, as his recent action proves. I think," he went on, "that this leaves no room for doubt. We face the long feared and evaded. Gentlemen, what shall we do?"

"Do what the country needs," snapped Gethelds, rising. "Fight!"

For the second time a summons fell upon the door of the room as Gethelds ceased speaking. For the second time Monsel responded, and received a sealed communication from the guard. This time it was to the President himself that he returned.

The Chief Executive tore it swiftly open, and scanned its single line. "Gentlemen, the Japanese ambassador left this city at midnight, *en route* for Canada," he said.

"They had it framed, all right," snarled Monsel.

Seaton, grizzled and silent, rose and bowed to the head of his department. "Mr. Manuels, assign me to active duty. Forget my age," he begged.

Manuels shook his head.

"The Atlantic fleet is already sailing to destroy the Japanese," he replied. "Mr. President, at least I think we can feel that the Eastern part of this country is safe. We will have only the Western condition to handle. We outnumber the approaching fleet vessel for vessel, and can easily cope with it."

"Unless their new bombs prove the joker," said Monsel. "I don't like that part of Darling's message, and now that I know it's Darling, it worries me more than ever. I never thought that chap a fool."

For the third time the door guard signaled. Once more Monsel brought back a message, which he handed to Secretary Barrison. Barrison gave it a glance, and tossed it on the table.

"The forces at Magdalena, Sonora, were attacked last night in the same manner as those at Ojo de Agua," he announced. "Gentlemen, it is all along the line. These are, doubtless, the men Darling said had landed on the Mexican west coast. A glance at the map will show you a railroad from Guaymas directly through Sonora. This affair assumes larger proportions with each minute. Mr. Ryan?"

"I still feel that the need for fresh volunteers is not manifest, though, I suppose, this means war with Japan," said Ryan.

Gethelds frowned.

"This is all rather irregular," he began. "Suppose we caucus the personal opinions of all present. This later news means that Carton cannot leave his present position quickly enough to be of service. We must use such other men as we have and augment them with the guardsmen. To do that is to ungarrison a large part of the country. We can replace the better trained men with volunteers and train them for the possible need. Mr. President, I vote for a call for men."

"I, too," said Harter.

"And I," added Monsel.

"I also," Seaton declared.

One by one the others present expressed their opinions. Stern-faced, set-lipped, hard-eyed, they cast

their votes for the measures, which should have been adopted weeks before, had they only been able to foresee what was to come.

One and then another they declared for the raising of armies and moneys, for the gathering together of all the munitions of war, until at the last, only the Secretary of State, thin-lipped and sullen as he listened, remained to be heard. And, as before, he voted "No" on the calling of volunteers.

Again the man outside the room of their deliberations signaled on the door, and this time it was to Secretary Ryan, that the message was addressed. He read it and the thin lips seemed to those who watched to half curl as he read. Without comment he turned and handed the message to President Gilson. Quite slowly the latter read it out:

Impossible to gain much further detail. Refugees coming in here report armed bands of Japanese moving across countryside. Unable to communicate with San Francisco, Los Angeles, or San Diego, or intermediate points. Wire, via Salt Lake, Ogden, and Reno, reports Bakersfield as burned, and all southern counties overrun. Will report later as rapidly as possible to gather facts.

JACKSON, Governor.

The President's lips set as he finished his reading. "Gentlemen," he began, "I thank you for your support in this matter. Of you all, Secretary Ryan alone has objected to the necessary measures. While this grieves me greatly, both from the fact and because I have always entertained the warmest friendship and regard for him as a man, yet I shall not allow his attitude to prevent our immediate action, as outlined and approved by you."

"Your excellency," Secretary Ryan interrupted, "this is not a personal matter. I assure you that my feelings as a man are as warm as ever, but I differ in policy in this. I cannot conceive of the urgent need you all seem to imagine. I fear that you and all my colleagues are swept forward by emotion, rather than sane judgment, and because of that I seek to prevent an uncalled for and unwarranted action."

President Gilson smiled.

"And you always were known as a man who would hang on to his opinion, William," he returned. "I am only sorry that it should be through you that I find myself faced by the same opposition that Lincoln met in sixty-one. I give you credit for sincerity, but I cannot accord my agreement. Gentlemen, I shall leave you now to a consideration of the necessary details, which are many. I shall immediately go to the capitol from here to read my message before both houses of Congress."

At two o'clock the President's message was bulletined all over the city. It asked for five hundred thousand volunteers. Thereafter one by one Carton's messages to the War Office, Jackson's reports of the uprising in California, and the sailing of the Atlantic Squadron to engage the Japanese fleet were given out and appeared in the typed scare-heads of the dailies' extras.

The city and country went wild. And there was no news that first day, save the meager reports of the messages from Carton and Jackson. Then along about five came the word that the army near Ojo de Agua was hotly engaged, that the Japanese regulars were openly fighting as allies of the Mexican troops, that they had sent up several aëroplanes and engaged the air squad of the United States forces and met with a first repulse.

CHAPTER IX

WAR WITH JAPAN

CENTRAL PARK lay dew wet under a soft October sun on the morning of the seventh, when Bernice opened her eyes and gazed from the window of her aunt's house on Eighth Avenue, near Sixty-Eighth. She stretched her limbs in luxurious laziness, turned on her side, and let her gaze wander out to the cool sun-kissed acres of the "Green."

After four days of New York, with the ever-recurring strangeness of her aunt's home at first wearing off, she felt strangely satisfied with life.

She rose, dressed, and descended to the breakfast she knew would be waiting. As she expected her aunt met her at table, and, womanlike, they sat and chatted over the meal with a total disregard to the flight of time.

To Bernice, accustomed to the management of the Washington home, it was a welcome relaxation of routine. After an hour of aimless chatter she rose. "And what is the programme for to-day, aunty?" she inquired.

"Quiet for my old bones," said her father's sister. "I can't go the pace of young blood, my dear, and we have a box for Tetrazzini to-night, as you know."

Bernice nodded.

"I'm not likely to," she responded. "I love Tetrazzini. But if I may have the car, I think I'll do some shopping this afternoon."

Her aunt gave a smiling assent, and rang for the maid to clear away the dishes.

"I'll run up and dress, and start right after luncheon," said Bernice. She turned from the room, ran up the stairs, and began a selection of costume for the afternoon.

It was while she was arranging her garments that there tumbled from a daintily folded bit of white stuff a crumpled envelope. The girl snatched it up, flushing slightly in the action, and replaced it in her trunk; yet not before she had glanced quickly at its postmark.

It was the action of habit, formed through the months, ever since it first came to her, and she read the half-blurred stamp of "Hite."

She sighed for no particular reason, rose, and began to dress. Three o'clock found her engaged in that most absorbing of female occupations, the invasion of the retail shopping district.

She had finished her purchases in one place, and was just stepping from its doors to her waiting car when the shrill treble of running newsboys struck her ear. They came racing down the street, waving damp papers, and screaming the foot high captions, which flared across the page.

"War with Japan! War with Japan!"

A grip rose in the throat of the girl who had come from the store. She turned and spoke to the chauffeur of the car, who still sat in his seat. "Get me an extra, please!" She threw him a coin.

He sprang down and joined a fighting mob about a disheveled, now half disrobed newsy, battered his way in, wrested away a print-smudged sheet of paper, and fought his way back to the motor. His cap was awry,

and the sleeve of his livery torn. He handed her the paper, and opened the tonneau door.

"Where to, miss?" he requested, with finger at visor.

"Home," said Bernice, and settled herself with the paper spread out before her. Her eye fastened on the news of the attack on Carton, and the California trouble, the recall of the fleet, and the possible battle which Carton must fight; the President's proclamation, and his call for volunteers. She lifted her eyes, after a bit, to find the car still standing by the curb. "Why don't you go on?" she asked.

The chauffeur shrugged, and smiled.

"I can't, miss," he explained. "These folks don't mind an auto horn no more. I've been blowing for a free way for ten minutes. They won't get out of the way."

Bernice folded the sheet she held, on impulse, and thrust it into the man's hands. He seized it eagerly, and bent above it. Herself, she gave her attention to the swarming street. It was jammed — full of shouting, gesticulating men and boys, against which, some blocks away, a squad of mounted traffic police was now making headway. She sat and waited their approach.

They came on, riding back the crowd, with perfect good nature.

As they passed she saw their faces, set, yet grimly smiling; a stalwart body of clean-set men. She became aware that the car was moving, and that the chauffeur had taken advantage of the free way granted by the police.

Once free of the press, he turned to return her paper. "I beg your pardon, miss, but I wonder if they'd take me in the aéroplane corps?" he suggested. "I know

a lot about engines." His dark face was alight. "I think I'll make a try for it, anyway!" he declared finally.

Bernice's aunt met her as she came in, her fine old face tense with excitement. "What is it, Biddy dear?" she wanted to know. "The boys have been crying extras. I thought they said something about more war, but you know how indistinctly they cry the news. And there's a telegram for you."

Bernice thrust the extra into her aunt's hands. "A telegram — from whom?" she asked quickly.

"I didn't open it, dear," said her aunt, adjusting her glasses to scrutinize the paper. "I had it placed in your room."

Bernice ran up the stairs and hastily found the little yellow envelope which inclosed the message. Tearing it open, she ran an anxious eye along its lines, folded it, and thrust it into the cover.

Don't worry, Biddy. Stay where you are and keep cool. This will be a stiffer job than the Mexican mix-up, but we'll land on top.
DAD.

The girl smiled slightly, with a pensive expression. "Dear old dad," she whispered.

She threw off her hat and jacket, and went down the stairs. "The message was from father," she told her aunt. "He says not to worry about this war news."

Getheld's sister sniffed. "That was always Fred's way," she returned. "'Don't worry,' he'd say, no matter what happened. 'Don't worry! There's always some way out. Keep cool and find it.'"

"And he always has found it," Bernice observed with pride. "Aunty," she added, "I think I shall go home to him."

"Go home? Goodness, child, what for?"

"I want to take care of dad," said the girl. "He'll have a heavy load to carry now. This affair means night and day work for him on the board. I've been the head of our house for years, and no one can take Biddy's place with dad. I'm going up and pack."

She came down after an hour, and sank into a chair in the cozily fire-lighted room where sat her aunt. "May I have the car to take me to the depot?" she asked.

"Of course," assented her aunt. "But really, Bernice, I don't know what you girls of the rising generation are coming to. Here you are, about to start on a night journey to Washington, during a great popular excitement. I suppose you'll get through somehow, but I would never think of such a thing myself. When I was a girl, if my father had said don't worry and stay where you are, I am sure I should have obeyed."

Bernice nodded. A smile flicked her lip. "No doubt you would have, aunty, but you see the day of obedient females has passed along with the hoop skirt — sort of rolled its hoop into the past."

"Bernice!" exclaimed her aunt, "you are actually growing slangy."

"Not growing, aunty dear," said Bernice. "And, besides, I want to go home. Why, with all this rush of business — and I know what this news means at home — dear old dad thought to send me a wire to reassure me. Don't you think a daughter ought to look after a dad like that?"

"I hope he sends you packing back, miss," smiled the old lady, somewhat mollified by her brother's praise. "What train do you take?"

"There's one at eleven on the Pennsylvania."

"You'll let me know if you arrive safely?"

"Of course. As dad would say, 'Don't worry.'"

"Humph!" said her aunt.

When later the young chauffeur drove her down to her train it was through a black swarming crowd of people. At the depot she bought the latest extra and learned of Carton's engagement while she waited for the train to start. Afterward she sought her berth and lay listening to the pound of the wheels.

At Philadelphia and again at Baltimore the train upon which she journeyed was held up, while long strings of coaches loaded with troops took right of way over its schedule. Already the moving of the regulars westward had begun.

It was the faint dawn of a golden day, the 8th of October, when she at last descended in her home city, called a taxi, and was driven to her home. She found no one there to receive her. The servants told her that the colonel had been called to the White House between twelve and one in the night.

Gethelds, called by phone to the Executive Mansion, found Barrison and Manuels already there. Together with President Gilson they were discussing a message which the former had just received from Colonel Gotz at Sacramento. It lay spread out upon the table about which the three men were sitting, and Gethelds picked it up.

Briefly it was a report of the events transpiring at San Francisco and Mare Island and a confirmation of Jackson's former dispatches. It closed with the definite information that the Japanese fleet had arrived on the Pacific coast. He laid it down.

"That is the final proof of their action," said Preai-

dent Gilson. "There is no longer any chance for doubt. Even Secretary Ryan must feel the seriousness of the situation now, I think. I have sent for him. We have been outgeneraled at every point in the beginning. Nothing but a firm and immediate policy can enable us to offset the advantage they have gained. I look to you all to assist me in this crisis."

"There can be no question as regards that, sir," assured Gethelds. "I admit the first shock is rather dazzling, but there is a way out for a nation as powerful as ours. We must keep cool and work together, as you say, to find that way."

"Troop movements began at dark," remarked Barrison as he paused.

Manuels frowned deeply. "The loss of the vessels at Mare Island hurts," he began. "I do not criticise Raymond. He did what he deemed best and he paid the price, poor fellow. The subtlety of their action is appalling."

"Those ships are better on the bottom of the bay than in Japanese hands, sir," said Gethelds.

"True," Manuels nodded. "After all, it is the army that must cope with the Western situation. When we have beaten their approaching squadron on this side, we can send our Atlantic fleet against them. Thank Heaven the canal is serviceable at last!"

"Yes, and I've taken all steps to guard it and keep it serviceable," Barrison cut in. "Further, Mr. President, I have had responses from the heads of twenty-five States this afternoon, informing me that their guardsmen will be mobilized at once."

As the President bowed his head in acknowledgment Secretary Ryan tapped upon the door and entered; and the President gave him Colonel Gotz's report. The

Secretary of State sat down, blinked his eyes, and nodded.

"Jackson appears to have really been right, then," he remarked. "I regret that it is so, as it means an inevitable conflict. Of course, we all admit the reliability of Gotz's report. The colonel has wired his father also. I was just in communication with the Representative myself. He will be here shortly."

"Here?" said Garrison sharply.

Ryan nodded.

"Yes. I invited him to come. I believe he desires to bring up some points for our consideration. He was one of my chief supporters at the time of the last alien land trouble in California, and I value his opinion."

"But there can be no longer any difference of opinion as to our necessary policy," began Gethelds. "We are forced into—"

The doorman rapped and opened the door to admit Representative J. C. Gotz. He crossed the floor in swift strides, greeting the several men with a jerky nod of the head, tossed his hat on the table, rolled a cigar to the other side of his mouth, and sat down.

"Mr. President," he burst out, "I just got a wire from my boy George — Colonel Gotz, you know — sent from Sacramento. It appears that these little yellow runts have slipped one across when we weren't looking and have grabbed 'Frisco. They did it slick, too, from what George says. An' then they tied up th' ships at the navy yard, but they couldn't tie George up.

"That boy took a plane an' beat it out to Sacramento. Well — that's all right — it's what he ought to have done, but what I want to get at is this: I want to say I'm glad to see th' prompt action you've taken in this matter. I wasn't in the House this morning —

was out of the city, in fact — but I've seen th' papers and I see that you're going right after this bunch from the other side.

"That's right, sir — dead right. We've got to send them back a-kitting. Why, the damage to business alone will be terrific. The property loss in California alone will be immense, and the depression of all securities, which must follow, will affect our entire financial system. Your bond issue hit me as just about right, too.

"I'm pretty well heeled and I mean to buy up a lot of them myself. Government bonds are always safe buys. In fact they'll be just about the safest things around until this shindy is settled. I want a chance to subscribe for a big block of them first off. I guess you'll bring George home and set him to licking aviators into shape, now, won't you, Barrison?"

"I have already wired him to report here," said the Secretary of War. "I will put him in charge of the organization of all volunteer airmen."

"That's the stuff," nodded Gotz. "George will lick 'em into shape. Not as I know we'll need them. This may be over pretty quick, but that boy can sure do it. And about planes, I guess you'll be needin' a lot of extra machines, eh? Well, I'll see you get 'em as fast as you want 'em, an' we'll let 'em go in at the regular contract rate and hang rush-order work."

A slight smile twitched President Gilson's lips.

"We will let you know what we want, of course, Mr. Gotz," he replied. "At present, thanks to the patriotic action of the Wright people, we will have over fifty planes with volunteer pilots ready by the time your son arrives, without one cent's expense to the department."

Gotz took his cigar from his lips. "You mean

they're givin' them to you?" he exclaimed in a palpable surprise.

"They have tendered them, and I have accepted. Yes."

"But you don't want 'em," declared the Member of Congress. "They ain't as good a machine as ours, any day in th' week. Th' examining board decided that, when they gave our house th' contracts."

"That is of course a question open to discussion," said Gilson coolly. "At least these machines are ready, and the Wrights are by way of being the pioneers of the airship. Further, these machines come as a free-will offering to the nation, and will be manned by men who have volunteered for the purpose, and are familiar with the machines. I look to see them do good service, Mr. Gotz."

"Oh, I don't doubt they'll fight 'em," said J. C., "and I don't doubt that after this shindy is over th' Wrights will come after part of the government business on their record."

He began chewing on the cigar held between his teeth.

Gilson frowned. "Mr. Gotz," he rejoined, "we have come here to discuss a national crisis, not to consider private business interests. There will be time enough for that when we have overcome the present danger. If you have any assistance to offer we will appreciate it greatly; if not, we will equally admire your refraining from further discussion at this time."

Gotz grinned without humor.

"Ryan told me you were riding a high horse, Mr. Gilson," he remarked. "Well, sir, my offer stands. You call the Wrights' move a patriotic action. I call it a bit of grandstandin' to cut under th' existing con-

tracts and grab a slice in the future. If it comes to a show-down, I guess I'm no more anxious to see this country get smashed enough to hurt it than any one else."

"You do have large interests," said Gethelds with meaning.

"An' I look out for 'em, too," said Gotz.

"Admitted," Colonel Gethelds retorted. "If it were not for that, we would to-day be in a position to laugh at this present menace. It was your selfish fear of some loss to your interests which made you antagonize the adoption of the Stillman aëro-destroyer."

J. C. gestured largely with his cigar.

"That was moonshine — a pipe dream," he asserted. "If it wasn't all bunk, then it was a pretty deep game with a joker tied to it somewhere."

"What was it, exactly?" demanded Gilson. "I heard the merest mention of it at the time."

"It was a wonderful air-ship," said Gethelds, "practical in the opinions of Captain Monsel and myself. Owing to Mr. Gotz's actions at the time it never got farther than a preliminary presentation to the board. Young Stillman left Washington the night of the same day — in disgust, I suspect."

"Or for fear he'd be trailed to his hole, an' his crook of a dad dug up," snapped Gotz.

"Gentlemen," interrupted the President, "this must stop. Mr. Gotz, you forget yourself, I think. Colonel Gethelds, after we finish our present consideration, I will ask you to remain and explain the facts of this aëro-destroyer to me."

"Keep quiet, J. C.," advised Secretary Ryan. "When I asked you to come along I didn't expect you to interrupt the star-chamber session."

President Gilson's jaw closed with a snap. Gots contented himself with another grin, which this time held some little mirth. "Mr. Garrison," Gilson continued, "what have you planned? Briefly, please."

"First," replied the Secretary of War, "I intend to rush, say, twenty thousand men into Sacramento. In the meantime Jackson will see to it that all communication by railroad west is kept destroyed, and will be mobilizing all guardsmen and volunteers obtainable at that city, and entrench. What planes escaped from Mare Island will act as scouts for him and keep an eye on the Jap's movements, with Lieutenant Larkin in command.

"Also, I shall throw a column west and south in the neighborhood of Tucson, where they can mobilize and be ready to unite with the army from Sonora as it withdraws. That will give us a strong body to resist any eastward movement from southern California. Also I shall throw a heavy body of volunteers into El Paso, to unite with Carton as he backs out of Chihuahua.

"With those men to add to his own he should crush the column which will follow him as he retires. That then will constitute our first line of defense, from which we can advance as rapidly as men can be equipped and sent forward."

President Gilson nodded. "It sounds well," he approved and glanced at Gethelds.

The colonel smiled. "It is the plan arranged and agreed upon after you left us to read your message yesterday morning."

"So Carton's coming out of Mex, is he?" Gots cut in once more. "I saw by a bulletin as I come up that he had evacuated Ojo de Agua, after a fight, and

was retreating. That's nice news for a start, if you ask me. Heard about it, Barrison?"

The secretary nodded shortly.

"Carton will follow orders and retire on El Paso," he remarked dryly. "This department is apt to know what it orders as soon as the Associated Press."

Gotz chuckled and rose. "Well, I ain't runnin' th' war," he observed, "but I got a suggestion. Give George plenty of planes an' he kin win it for you. Look at the Mex campaign up to now."

"The Japanese use planes, too, and they know how to use them, Mr. Gotz," said Manuels with impatience, breaking in for the first time. "Our planes will have to fight theirs in this struggle."

"That's why you need good ones," grinned J. C., and walked out.

"And your plans, Manuels?" inquired Gilson when Gotz had gone.

"They extend only to destroying this Atlantic squadron, sir," the secretary replied. "Aside from the Atlantic fleet and a possible ship or two in the islands, I have nothing else to work with. When I shall have dealt with the approaching vessels I shall, with the sanction of yourself and my associates, proceed to the Pacific and remove the line of retreat which the enemy now in California would seek first to follow."

"I shall pray for your success, sir," said Gilson. "Their sending this Atlantic squadron puzzles me and, I confess, disturbs. Unless there is truth in the statement of Barrison's agent concerning a new form of weapon, it appears an extremely foolhardy move."

"My idea," resumed Manuels, "is that they expected us to split our fleet and send part to the attempted capture of their Pacific squadron and transports at San

Francisco. They could then have handled us piece-meal. It is an old trick."

The President nodded. "Perhaps that is it." He turned to Garrison. "Were Carton's losses heavy to-day?"

"Nominal," Garrison answered. "He retired by order, not from need."

"Good!" Gilson smiled. "That will be all, then, gentlemen. Follow your plans. We will rest now for a few hours, until some new detail requires our attention. And now, Gethelds, if you'll give me an hour to discuss that Stillman device?"

Colonel Gethelds bowed. Garrison, Manuels, and Ryan rose. When they had taken their departure Gilson again turned to Gethelds. "And now, colonel?" he said.

The day dawned blue and golden, with a tang of frost in the air. In the streets of the capital of the nation the crowds collected early and moved slowly. The news of Carton's retirement appeared in all the papers.

Uninformed of the strategy which caused it, the people took it as a first defeat. A pensive sense of depression marked the reaction from the mad frenzy of acclaim and defiance which had set the keynote for the day before.

Bernice, waiting for her father's arrival, read the papers with an aching heart. Her thoughts were with her nation and her friends.

What, she had wondered, had become of Gotz when San Francisco fell? The papers had told her to-day of his spectacular flight. Now she was puzzling her mind to imagine what had become of Harold Darling and what it was that he had gone to accomplish.

A step on the walk roused her to the present. She saw her father coming toward the porch steps with bowed head. He was walking. He had preferred to walk when he left the White House.

She rose and stood at the top of the steps as he mounted. Half up she spoke his name.

He lifted his head and a light woke in his eyes as he quickened his ascent. "Biddy!" he called. "Child, what brings you home?"

Bernice smiled as his arms went around her and he kissed her. "There's no place like home. I was afraid you'd need me, with this new trouble coming. I wanted to come home, dad."

"It's good to see you," said her father slowly.

"You're tired," said the girl. "Come in. You shall lie down and rest while we wait for breakfast, and I'll sit beside you. You can tell me all about what you've done since I've been away. Come on, daddy."

CHAPTER X

WHAT HAPPENED OFF SANDY HOOK

On the tenth day of October Darling arrived in Washington, and immediately made his report to the Strategy Board, going into extended details to prove his theories well founded. Among other things, he mentioned that Mexico was swarming with Japanese, ostensibly private individuals, "but," said Harold, with a grim smile, "private soldiers in my private opinion."

"And what, sir, do you make of that?" Secretary Garrison asked.

"This," said Darling. "As we know, some of them are now operating against Carton. Also we know that their Atlantic squadron is approaching our shores, and that without an army to back them, they can do no more than bombard coastal ports. But — supposing they should evade or overcome our fleet — they could throw these men in Mexico onto our western seaboard."

Seaton and Manuels, who was with him, laughed. "You think they could overcome our fleet?" quizzed the latter.

"I was speaking of the theory merely, Mr. Manuels," said Harold. "They might even lead it off on a chase and let their troop-ships slip in at some unguarded point."

Manuels nodded. "Well, they're not hurrying any," he remarked. "They're loafing along as if they were waiting for our boats to come up."

Darling spoke quickly. "Exactly. They are in-

viting the battle. Yet they are numerically weaker. That is what worries me. Why?"

"At least," Barrison began, "we have to thank you for a brilliant piece of work, Darling. Right now we have matters well in hand. Carton is executing a brilliant withdrawal; the movement of troops is going on quickly; volunteers are in excess of what we asked for. In a week we'll be stronger than for a good many years."

"And the fleet is within striking distance now," said Manuels. "My last report removes all doubt of their arrival in time."

The meeting broke up and Gethelds took Darling home to lunch. He was a new Darling, thinner, browned to a coppery tint, which blond skins acquire under a tropic sun. Under the excitement of his last few weeks of living, he had laid aside a bit of his drawl as he spoke.

Bernice scarcely recognized him as the same man she had seen last when he ran up the steps and bent over her hand with the grace of a Virginia cavalier. "You had my note, little sister. I've come to report," he said.

"Do you share the unfaith in woman's discretion that you left it for dad to tell me of the frightful risks you took?" laughed Bernice.

"I share no unfaith in woman," said Darling.

"Come on in," the girl invited. "I think it was splendid. I think I never gave you your just credits. I didn't really know you at all."

Darling smiled. "I am ready to receive back payment," he answered her gayly, while he waited for her to precede him within.

Over the luncheon the conversation turned naturally upon Harold's experience in the Mexican capital. He

spoke freely, without any restraint in Bernice's presence. On her part she eyed him constantly with a new appreciation of his value, a new and heretofore undreamed conception of the fires beneath his exterior seeming — fires she had known nothing of since their days of childhood, when he had at times been given to violent outbursts of temper.

Listening, she thrilled to his words in a way entirely new.

"With an accent, a pipe, and a portable bath, a man may do much for his country," Darling was saying to her father, and she felt he was speaking to her. "My people sent me to England to gain an education, and, as Biddy says, I brought back an accent. I took it along with me when I went to Mexico.

"It was easy to get in. I passed for a mad English tourist, and was accepted as such. I poked about, and asked inane questions and made all sorts of acquaintances. Of course, I spent money. They like it down there even better than we do. On a Mexican of sorts it acts like a reënforced cocktail on the average man — it loosens tongues.

"At that, I had no little trouble in getting facts, though I soon found there was something under the surface. Carton licked the daylights out of their armies and they grinned. '*Mañana*,' said they. 'Wait. There will be yet another story, *señor*.'

"After I had heard that a few hundred times I came to imagine it had a meaning, really. So I spent an awful lot of time in cafés and such places, and ruined my tummy with their imitation drinks; but I fraternized — oh, I was dreadfully friendly! I grew quite chummy with a bunch of gold-braid Federal hotheads, and I learned — by degrees."

Gethelds smiled. "I take it, then," he said, "that you think the entire action of Mexico was in the nature of a false attack to attract our attention from the real object, which was the Japanese movement?"

Darling nodded. "Yes. Also, I think they must have an army of, say, a hundred and fifty thousand hidden in small bodies throughout the country. They have been coming in for over a year in small shipments from Canada, the Hawaiians, and Japan itself. They will give the Japs their eastern army of attack. It has been cleverly done; but they *are* clever. Look at their capture of San Francisco and their probable seizure of the Hawaiians on the same night. We have always thought they would take the islands first and that we'd have warning. But did we? Scarcely."

"They're subtle," said Gethelds, rising. "Well, I am to go back to the White House for a time, so I will leave you two youngsters. I know Biddy wants to ask you about a thousand questions." He left the room.

"You'll stay and play with me?" Bernice inquired.

"Till evening, yes," said Harold. "It seems good to see you again, little sister. This evening I'm going down home for over Sunday. If I may, I'll 'phone my mechanic and have him get the plane ready and fly down."

Bernice nodded. "I'll drive you out to the hangar when you go."

"Right-o!" accepted Darling as he rose.

Bernice followed, and sank into a chair while he got his man and told him to go out and get the big aéroplane in commission for the flight across the river to the Darling Virginia home.

"I can't seem to really believe it yet," she said, laughing softly when he hung up. "To think that the big

brother I've always thought such a practical idler has all along been a man of mysterious endeavor! And the last time I talked to you I told you I wished you'd try and do something — do you remember?"

"So I did," laughed Harold. "I went right away, and I fancy I was fairly successful."

"Well, I'm proud of my big brother," said the girl. "I love a manly man — a man who isn't afraid — who does things with a smile."

"I wonder," Harold answered her with a smile.

"Wonder?" she repeated.

"Yes. Little sister, if you don't mean it, don't play any more with fire. The man who does things is the man who wants things, be they wealth or power or a woman. We've played together since we were kids, little girl; at first the games of childhood and then those of youth.

"Well, dear, it isn't play with me any more. The playtime is over. So if you don't feel the same, why, just let it be brother and sister. Don't answer me now. Take time to look into your heart and see whether you'd miss me greatly if I were gone — as I missed you this last time while away."

"I did miss you," she said softly. "Really, Harold, it made things awfully lonesome having you gone."

"That's hardly what I mean," he told her. "Lonesome, yes; but was it a lonesomeness which nothing could break save my coming back?"

For a moment she sat silent, head bowed, toying with a fold of her dress ere she lifted her eyes and met those of the man fully.

"I know what you mean, big brother," she answered. "I know — a girl does — but I don't know whether I missed you in that way or not. You see, I never knew

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the real you before. But I am going away — back to New York Monday evening — and while I am there I'll find out. I don't want to go, but dad thinks I'll be better with my aunt than here with him away so much and the town so full of unrest. I'm not afraid, of course, but I'm going to do as he wishes."

Darling nodded. "You don't care, little sister," he decided. "If you did you wouldn't have to try to find out — you would know. At least tell me this, though: It isn't Gotz?"

"Gotz! You mean George?" She threw back her head and laughed without restraint.

Harold grinned in spite of his disappointment. "Suppose you think me a silly sort of chap to ask," he remarked. "All the same, that laugh of yours is a bit of relief, because as long as there isn't some one else I shall go on hoping. Well, now, I think your father said you'd be wanting to ask me questions. Let the interrogation proceed."

Thus he put away his self-plea and through two hours chatted with the woman in the old-time way. At the end she rang for her car and drove him out to the hangar, saw him enter the pilot's seat, and dart away to the south.

Yet she drove home slowly with a little fold of perplexed concentration between her gray eyes and a strange, new throb in her pulse. At least Harold Darling made love like a man.

The next day was Sunday, and the bells in the towers of Washington churches tolled through a crisp, golden air. A serious demeanor in contrast to the frenzied enthusiasm of the first few days marked the people's behavior.

Despite its now known meaning and approval, still

Carton's steady retirement northward sobered the spirit of the nation. Yet there was no fear. A firm confidence was the prevailing attitude.

That evening Darling flew up and spent the early hours with Bernice, and the next day he saw her to the train for New York. At the last minute he shook hands with a smile. "If the Jappies take little old New York just phone me, and I'll fly up to the rescue," he observed. "Or if you get lonesome — really lonesome —"

The girl flushed and took refuge in persiflage. "If I get lonesome I will wire you," she said lightly. "I'll wire: 'Come fly with me.' "

"I'll fly," assured Harold, and handed her through the barrier gate.

"And you'll look after dad?" she requested.

Darling nodded and lifted his hat.

It was on Tuesday, the thirteenth, before daylight, that the Atlantic fleet steamed past the mouth of the Chesapeake and continued on north and east to their meeting with the vessels of Japan, now reported as advancing swiftly to the battle for which they had palpably waited.

Hour by hour thereafter the wireless station sent its reports by phone into the office of Secretary Manuels in the Army and Navy Building. But it was not until eleven o'clock that the word for which he had waited thrilled to him over the wire: "Aëroplane scouts in advance, report enemy advancing in battle formation twenty miles north, northeast our position. Shall engage as soon as within effective range."

There followed the longitude and latitude of the location of the American Squadron.

Manuels's face grew tense as he replaced the receiver

and turned to an immense chart on the wall of his office, picking out the positions of the two opposing fleets. He took up the 'phone again and ordered himself put in communication with President Gilson, spoke briefly, and turned back.

Thereafter he sent brief messages of information to Barrison, to Seaton, to Harter, and Monsel, and such other members of the board of strategy as could be reached at the moment. It was the hour for which they had waited for days, which would influence largely the further course of the war, for if the American ships should triumph the entire country could turn its attention toward the West and the outcome would be but a question of days, or weeks at most.

Small wonder that Manuels's face showed emotion.

Darling was in Barrison's department in consultation with that official when the word was received. "Mr. Secretary, let me in on this," he begged. "It is the crucial moment. It will prove if I am right about those aërial bombs. They'll use them now if ever. I hope to God I am wrong, but take me with you when you go over to Manuels's diggings."

Barrison nodded.

He rose and gave orders to forward any message for his consideration to Manuels's department, where the President and the other official heads of the country's forces would wait the outcome of the approaching engagement. Together the two men walked down the corridor which led to the Navy Department's rooms.

They found President Gilson, Seaton, and Harter already arrived, and hard upon their heels, Monsel, his dark face full of nervous excitement, hurried in. He swept the assembled men an interrogative glance and spoke to Manuels: "Anything more, sir?"

Manuels shook his head, and Monsel dropped into a seat and nervously lighted a cigarette. Several others came in. Monsel caught sight of Darling and nodded, smiling. "We'll know pretty soon whether you were right about their having those bombs," he remarked. "I hope to the Lord you were wrong, old man!"

Darling nodded. "I want to be," he said.

Other cabinet and board members arrived and added to the group, who waited further word from the fleet. The telephone buzzed, and, without waiting for Manuels, Monsel, who was nearest at the moment, caught it up.

"Navy!" he called sharply and held the receiver to his ear. His warning "S-s-s-sh!" quieted the subdued voices in the room. In a moment he put down the receiver and spoke:

"Air-scouts have been called in. Fleet cleared for action and proceeding under forced draft. Japanese scout-cruiser appeared a few moments ago and withdrew. Main fleet of enemy just coming into view. They are steaming fast in a west-by-north course."

He put down the phone and gazed about the room. "They're coming together at nearly a mile a minute now," he said in intensified tones. "They'll be at hand-grips in another twenty minutes."

Seaton nodded. "The Japs will get a much-needed lesson," he predicted.

"Unless —" began Darling.

Harter cut in. "You mean the bombs? Well, if they have them, why haven't they used them against Carton's army and cut it up?"

Monsel drew a telephone head-piece from his pocket and turned to Manuels. "Let me report for you," he requested, gesturing to the 'phone.

The secretary smiled assent. Monsel deftly cut his head-piece in on the receiver and clamped it over his head. He lifted the receiver from the hook and spoke to the operator of the exchange. "Plug me in on the wireless station now, and don't cut me off till I tell you." He sat back in his chair and waited. It was past twelve o'clock.

Suddenly he lifted his hand and sat forward, listened intently, and began a mechanical repetition of a message: "Japanese now seen clearly. They are advancing in battle formation. Am lowering submarines now. Expect to engage inside fifteen minutes. Weather clear, with a calm sea."

Manuels smiled on the group about him. "That means good shooting, gentlemen. With a calm sea, God help the ship which gets in range of our boys!"

"And God save our boys!" said Gilson softly, breaking into the conversation. "Mr. Monsel, please ask the wireless to send this to the fleet: 'The God of right and the nation are with you.'"

Monsel nodded, leaned forward, and transmitted the message, then leaned back. Presently he spoke again. "Mr. President, the fleet sends this to the country and you: 'Message received and transmitted to fleet units. Crews at quarters are cheering. The stars and stripes forever! Japanese fleet has stopped and sent up two small monoplanes, probably as scouts against submarines.'"

Gilson's lips tightened. "They are brave," he said as with an effort.

Seaton nodded agreement. "And this is their first real test, sir. An hour now and they will have proved worthy."

The President rose and began to pace the room.

"Worthy, yes," he gave back. "I do not doubt it, Mr. Seaton. But it is the horrible necessity which grieves me. Some of them, many perhaps, must prove worthy unto death. Some of those cheering throats will never cheer again when your hour is past. Some time, somewhere, the hand of a just God must strike the nation which forces this upon us!"

"I think this is about the strike, sir," said Manuels.
"I—"

"S-s-sh!" hissed Monsel at the phone.
Silence came down again, save for the slow breathing of the men.

"Japanese fleet acting in most peculiar manner. Have split their column and are swung right and left in what appears to be an attempted enveloping movement. They are preserving an approximately nine-mile radius and show no inclination to come closer. Shall change front to meet their evolution. Submarines have left to engage."

Manuels frowned. "Funny tactics," he remarked. "I don't see why they are holding off. No one can accuse them of cowardice."

Monsel glanced up and met Darling's eyes. Gethelds edged over beside them. "What do you—" he began, when Monsel checked him with a gesture of his hand. A smile broke across his face and grew and widened ere he swung and cried forth his tidings.

"A Japanese cruiser at the extreme southern end of their column swung well in and encountered a submarine. She engaged with her quick-fires, but was unsuccessful. The submarine, believed to be Z-8, got home with a torpedo and the cruiser sank by the head."

Turning, he brought down both fists on the desk in vent of his feelings. "Wow! Good old Z-8!" he

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cried out in a voice which quivered. "Score first blood for us!"

He turned his attention once more to the wire, over which came other words of moment. But now, his face glowing and lighted by fires of jubilation at the first success, grew worried and anxious as he listened.

"Gentlemen," he called hoarsely, breaking in upon the chatter of the men, whom even his listening attitude had not served to still in their flush of good news—"gentlemen, battle-ship *Ms.* reports a terrific explosion on forward part of battle-ship *N. Y.*, completely wrecking forward turrets and mast and portion of front superstructure. Fleet is not yet within effective range and no evidence of gun fire from enemy was observed. Cause of explosion is not known, but men in fighting tops of *N. Y.* allege they observed projectile strike ship and felt her list from impact just before explosion. No doubt but enemy are using new and extremely potential weapon. Explosions similar to that on *N. Y.* have just occurred on *Dw.* and cruiser *Ok.* Upper turret of *Dw.* wrecked and lower jammed; entire superstructure *Ok.* wrecked. Captain and all deck officers killed, ship rendered useless. We are seeking to come to closer quarters and engage at effective range."

Manuels's face grew pallid as Monsel ceased. "The new bombs," he said in a sort of strangled tone. "Darling, you were right."

"But nine miles!" gasped Seaton. "Darling, what are the things like?"

"Like a winged torpedo, so far as I could learn, commodore; effective at some ten miles," said Darling.

"And their fleet has them?"

"Yes. I feared it."

The Secretary of the Navy's lips grew into a thready

line. "And we haven't," he resumed speaking. "I wonder—is this their strength which made them seek this battle? Gentlemen, does our fleet face annihilation?"

"My God!" choked Seaton. "Manuels, you don't—you can't mean—"

Monsel began again: "Enemy refuse close quarters. They are withdrawing as we advance. Fire of new projectiles continues. *Nb.* hard hit and listing badly. *Pa.* has lost a funnel and both fighting tops. Cruiser *Psc.* sinking from wound below protective belt, will last but few minutes. *N. Y.* again hit and reduced to hulk, with all superstructures gone. Shall send torpedo flotilla forward in hopes of their being able to get close enough for torpedoes to prove effective. At present we are powerless to make any telling return to enemy's fire."

"Damn them!" snarled Harter, springing to his feet. "The cowardly dogs! They lie off and shoot us to pieces. They won't take a fair issue. They—"

"Don't swear, General," said the President with quivering lips. "We are facing a terrible crisis."

Monsel, both his thin hands gripping the telephone standard, gave no attention to the conversation. He was waiting, waiting, for the voice along the wire—the voice which piled Ossa on Pelion and crushed each loyal soul in grief. In broken fragments it came.

The man who spoke to him stammered and faltered. "Torpedo flotilla hotly engaged. Have succeeded in placing three shots in as many vessels. During advance three were struck by enemy's missiles and sunk. Japanese destroyers have now engaged remainder in counter attack. Fire of main squadron continues with heavy effect. Battleships *Pa.*, *Fa.*, *Cn.*, and *Ms.* badly

damaged, though still serviceable. *Ut.*, *Na.*, *Wy.*, *Cf.*, out of column and useless. *Nb.* and *Sd.* sunk. Cruisers *Ok.*, *Dt.*, *Dk.*, *Gv.*, *No.*, sunk within last few minutes by concentrated fire. Minor injuries to nearly every vessel in fleet."

President Gilson wrung his hands.

"Monsel," he said quickly, "order them to fall back on Sandy Hook and get under the protection of its guns. Quickly, Monsel; quickly. They are dying in vain. It is useless. Order them back!"

"In a moment, sir," assented the captain at the wire. For a few seconds longer he listened, and then spoke the order before he turned half around: "The torpedo flotilla is gone, sir," he reported. "Some of them tried to get back, but they couldn't escape. They picked them off like pigeons at a trap shoot. Oh — oh — oh, God!"

He dropped his head on the desk and his shoulders shook.

Yet in a moment he was at his self-imposed task again, taking the reply of the fleet's commander. Again he turned to the President, where he paced the floor, head bowed, hands twined behind his back. "They will obey orders, sir," he said dully, dropped his hands on the desk, and sat bowed forward.

The room had grown to a babble of excited comment, sighs, half-voiced exclamations, and mouthing of dismay. Into the subdued clamor broke a rapping at the door. Getholds, who was nearest it, like Gilson, restlessly pacing, wrenched it open and seized a message from a page.

With this he advanced upon Barrison, sitting thin-lipped where he had sat throughout the waiting, his fingers fumbling in aimless fashion with a button on his coat.

Barrison took the message, ripped it open, and gave it a glance. A ghastly pallor swept his face. The hand which held the bit of paper trembled so that the sheet quivered in his grasp. The other hand, which lay on the arm of his chair, closed in a clawlike grip of repression.

"Darling — gentlemen!" he exclaimed hoarsely, struggled as if for control, and went on: "Carton reports the Japanese as using a new weapon to-day also. He has lost an entire battery and two thousand men since daylight and is now heavily engaged. They are firing upon him from a six-mile range and reach his position at will."

He crushed the message he held in his grasp.

President Gilson had sunk into a chair and buried his face in his hands. Not a face in that room but was blanched and drawn and wide-eyed with horror.

Secretary Ryan, who had been silent throughout the hour which had written the doom of the American squadron, still sat inert, slouched down in his seat.

Gethelds, suddenly aged beyond his years, stood with bowed head and clenched hands. Once more Monsel was listening at the phone. Once more his voice alone filled the room with pitiless detail:

"They are trying to withdraw. The Japanese are pursuing. Only three battle-ships and one cruiser are now floating. The fire of projectiles still continues. They can't escape. The Japs are beginning to close in."

The man at the 'phone choked before he went on: "Mr. President, the flag-ship is sinking. It is the last. They are saying good-by." Overcome by emotion, he sank back and dropped his head on the desk where he sat.

Manuels, his face working, turned to Seaton, and,

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with tears streaming down his face, laid his head on the commodore's shoulder.

President Gilson straightened. His eyes swept the assembled men. He opened his lips, and his words were distinct, clear-cut in their enunciation.

"They have proven worthy," he cried. "God rest the souls of brave men and help the nation they died to defend. Gentlemen, we face a crisis. There is much to consider, and no time to mourn save in our innermost souls."

It was one-thirty. In an hour and a half the thing had been done.

Strangely enough, the fleet which had dealt the terrible blow made no move during all those hours of the afternoon. Like savage beasts, bloodsated with the kill, the gray monsters of Japan wallowed in the waves which hid their pitiful victims. Above them flew a few small aircraft like vultures over a carcass.

Not until some time before morning did they slip forward toward the forts on Sandy Hook. Their salute to the sunrise was a projectile which burst in the air above the gun implantations in the forts.

When the word was flashed from New York, Darling, who was sitting with Gethelds, turned white-faced upon him and voiced a word of personal dismay: "Biddy! Gethelds, Bernice is in New York!"

A spasm crossed the older man's face.

"Yes," he said slowly. "She and my only sister. I thought she would be safer."

Darling's lips tightened into resolve. "They can't get out now. It wouldn't be safe. Everybody will try it. There'll be a mob. It will be awful. But Gethelds—if the Hook forts can't stop these devils I'm going up there in my plane!"

CHAPTER XI

WHEN NEW YORK PAID THE PRICE

THERE was but little sleep for the citizens of the city of Greater New York on the night of the thirteenth. The news of the fleet's destruction by the mysterious weapon of the Japanese produced such a panic as the city had never known. Not but what many denied that the enemy could capture the port, no matter what they had done to the fleet.

Many still professed full faith in the forts, which had been believed to be practically impregnable. But though there were many such, they were not the more timid spirits. The mass of the people went wild.

An exodus started even as early as two o'clock in the afternoon. Every branch of transportation service was heavily taxed by those who jammed the cars of all outgoing lines to capacity, packing themselves into every available foot of space. The ferries east and west resembled overloaded excursion boats for many hours.

Long lines of depositors formed quickly in front of banks and demanded their savings, that they might take them with them beyond the zone of danger.

As night deepened, immense crowds gathered about the bulletins of the papers. Union Square became a packed and jostling mass of thousands. Other vast crowds collected here and there about the street meetings of the Salvation Army and the Volunteers and

listened to the exhortations of the speakers. Wild excitement reigned.

Up in the neighborhood of Sixty-Eighth Street, however, there was comparative quiet, and Bernice Gethelds remained with her aunt. Shortly after the news of the fleet's destruction had become dreadfully certain she had sent a telegram to her father. That it was never delivered—that in that time of excitement it was lost or missent, or mislaid, she did not then know.

Together with her elderly companion she was waiting a reply which should tell her to remain or fly from the city. Somewhere around two o'clock in the morning her aunt dropped into a restless slumber, and the girl threw herself down on a couch and fell presently asleep.

She awoke with a dull, pounding roar in her ears. For a moment she lay and listened, and heard it again and again—a heavy, portentous pulse of sound, which throbbed with dreadful insistence.

Rising without waking her aunt, who tossed and muttered in her sleep, she went to the window and looked out. It was dawn, with the sunlight of a new day streaming across the park. But she gave it a single glance and turned her eyes to the street before the house. It was jammed, a steadily moving mass of vehicles of every sort—autos and auto trucks, auto buses and auto deliveries, milk-carts, express-wagons, drays.

They flowed steadily northward as the girl stood and watched.

And they were loaded with people, with household belongings, with men and women carrying bundles of personal treasures, hugged to their breasts. Here and there even an humble pushcart had been pressed into

service to move a trunk and some smaller things. She saw a shaggy dog harnessed to a toy wagon trundle it by — its sides overflowing with a collection of clothing on top of which lay a little boy's drum.

So, as she watched the stream of flotsam from abandoned homes flowed past, and behind it came the steady pound of the guns which had waked her a short time before.

In front of her very door a touring-car, loaded with household goods and a woman and a baby, had broken down, its wheel crushed by a larger truck. Its driver was down, examining the irreparable damage. When she lay down, Bernice had not undressed.

Now she ran down to the front door and out to the curb. She spoke to the man almost brusky:

"Why are you leaving? Why are you running away?"

He looked up and grinned a slightly rueful reply. He was a young fellow with a well-modeled face.

"I might ask you why you are not, young lady, and point out that I have stopped."

"What has happened?" Bernice insisted.

"Nothing yet," said the man. "But it's coming. They are fighting at the Hook forts, and the forts are getting what the fleet got. We were trying to get away before they bombarded the city."

Bernice stamped her foot. A sudden rage assailed her heart. "I don't believe the city will be taken," she flashed back. "I don't believe the forts will fall."

"Don't you? You've a better faith than many — than I have." The young man shook his head. "Anyway, I want to get my wife and baby to a safe place. You don't mean you're going to stay here?"

Out of sheer obstinacy, she nodded: "Yes."

"Then see here," exclaimed the man. "Let me bring our things inside, will you? This machine can't go any farther. I hate to ask you, but we didn't bring much. How about it?"

Again Bernice nodded.

The man waited no second permission. He began dragging the things out of the tonneau. His wife laid down the baby and began to help him.

Presently all three were engaged in taking them inside, Bernice lending a hand. At the end she urged them to stay with herself and aunt, but they refused. She stood at the door and watched them walk away into the north, the man carrying the baby, his wife holding to his hand.

She went and roused her aunt. Together they stood at the window and watched. The sidewalks had grown full of hurrying crowds, streaming northward. Men and women, struggling forward, bent under burdens which they carried; alone or leading children by the hand.

They hurried past in an unbroken stream toward the upper part of the island. Bernice shuddered as she imagined the crush of traffic across the northern approaches to the city. After an hour she led her aunt down-stairs for a cup of coffee.

The older woman trembled.

"We had better go," she kept repeating. "I don't understand why Frederick doesn't answer our message. It isn't like Fred at all."

"I can't say," said Bernice. "We can't tell. Dad must be working day and night. Someway he may never have received the message, or he may think us safe right here. I can't believe the forts will be taken, myself."

"But even if he didn't get the message he might have wired us," complained her aunt.

"He may even have tried," Bernice defended.
"Listen!"

She paused and strained her ears, conscious now that the dull pound, pound of the guns had ceased. "They have quit firing!" she exclaimed quickly. "Aunty, maybe they've driven the fleet away."

"Or maybe the fleet has taken the forts," amended her companion.

The girl straightened and her eyes widened at the possibility suggested. Suddenly she wrung her hands. "No!" she cried out in horrified protestation. "No! Oh, God, not that — not that!"

She ran through to the front and tore open the doors to gaze out.

The road in front was still filled with those flying into the north, but now of a poorer class than had characterized the morning's exodus. And on their faces was a strained expression of haste and fear.

Bernice ran down the step and seized the arm of a man. He was an old man, and walked with a limp, helped out by a cane. He was breathing heavily as he walked, and the girl saw that he wore a faded blue coat with a little bronze button in its lapel.

She clung to him and panted a question: "What has happened? Why have they quit firing? Oh, you're an old soldier. Tell me. I am a soldier's daughter."

The man paused and removed his soft black hat.

"Th' worst has happened, missy," he intoned slowly, as one making a report to his commander. "Th' forts has fallen, an' th' Jap fleet is comin' up th' bay. Run,

missy—git away. We're beaten for th' minute, an' we're all runnin'—all them as kin. But we'll come back after a bit—oh, yes. It was them cussed bombs of theirs done it, like they done to th' fleet. I got a girl up in Harlem I'm goin' up an' git an' take out of town. An' then, if it's any use, I'm comin' back. I'm old, but I kin pull a trigger. Kin I help you any, missy?"

"No," Bernice said slowly. "No, thank you. My aunt's inside. I must go tell her."

"Tell her to git away. If it hadn't been fer them infernal bombe they'd never have done it," quavered the old man.

"Yes, yes," said Bernice. She turned away and ran back to her aunt.

"We must go away—go away. Oh, how awful!" sobbed the elder woman. "I don't understand your father's actions. Bernice, we must pack. Go get your things together while I get some of mine. Oh, how dreadful—how dreadful."

Bernice nodded and ran to her room.

She began throwing what she felt she must take into a traveling-case. Her heart was heavy. She thought of her father and Harold Darling, and of the thousands in the streets as she worked. She wondered just where they would go when they joined that north-bound procession.

Throughout the city thousands like her packed a few treasures and wondered where they should go.

After a time she took up her filled bag and went back down the stairs. Her aunt sat at the telephone, calling into the mouthpiece. She lifted a worried face as Bernice came in.

"I can't get the garage," she complained. "The service is perfectly dreadful of late. Central won't even answer. I can't order the car."

"Never mind." Bernice set down the bag she carried. "Are you all ready, aunty? I'll go get the car myself. I know where the place is. It's only a short ways."

A vast sound filled the room and set its walls to rocking. A quiver ran through the floor. A dull-rending, roaring dissonance forced itself into the ears of the two women.

The woman who sat at the 'phone started up and cried out, grasping at her heart. Before Bernice could reach her she sank unconscious to the floor.

As Bernice ran for water with which to revive her aunt from her faint, a second tremendous concussion shook the house. The girl trembled as she came back, knelt and began to lave the hands and face of her father's sister.

The destruction of the city of New York was consistent with the rest of the strategy of Japan. Prior to engaging the city's defenses the fleet had sent a wireless message demanding surrender. The mayor and his advisers, still clung to their belief in the ability of the forts on Sandy Hook to defend the city.

They returned a refusal. Whereupon the Japanese engaged and silenced the forts after an hour's steady bombardment with the new aerial bomb, which proved terribly effective.

Without waiting, they immediately steamed into the lower harbor and proceeded toward the city, whose skyline showed in sun-tipped and gilded towers and columns of masonry and steel. In that progress two

cruisers and a battle-ship struck mines and were completely or partially destroyed.

A fourth was hit by a bomb thrown from a strange aëroplane which darted above it and disappeared, and was never heard of again. The vessel was badly damaged. As a result the temper of the enemy was decidedly ruffled when they finally lay to in the upper harbor.

Aside from all that the destruction was actually unavoidable from their standpoint. They were unsupported by their eastern army at that time. Their marines were insufficient to police so great a city.

To destroy it would have a greater demoralizing effect on the American people than anything else, showing as it would the terrific power of the new weapon they used.

As a result they set about their terrible task in cold blood. A bomb was launched against the Metropolitan Tower. It struck well up near the top and burst in a blinding sheet of flame, which seemed to wrap the monolith of stone and steel in a fiery embrace.

The tower shook, bent, and as the loosened stone and brick broke from its setting in the frame a terrible cascade of débris poured downward into the street, while a cloud of powdered brick, stone, and mortar rose and drifted north and west before the wind.

The second bomb struck lower down, with a similar effect save that now the entire framework, driven entirely out of plumb and partly riven asunder, toppled like a great tree and fell with an earth-shaking roar across the street and the lower buildings. At the time the streets were full of people, and the loss of life was immense.

Many had still refused to believe that the city was to be destroyed and had purposely stayed down-town. Many others were fleeing aimlessly through the district and were caught in the swift destruction which followed, as bomb after bomb followed the first.

A roar as of mighty cataracts rang through the cañons of the streets. It was the noise of the falling walls of buildings, of plunging, splintering brick and rock, which hurtled from its high emplacement, carrying death to whatever living thing it struck. Yet in those last dreadful minutes of the lower city many who had waited sought to escape, and the narrow streets grew full of huddled and grotesquely twisted bodies sprawled along them, half buried in the litter of the havoc. Fires broke out and burned unchecked.

For there were none to fight them or any use in so doing, when the destruction grew with each slow, terror-charged minute. The smoke of the flames rose and joined the dust-clouds and hung like a pall above the city. Ever and again it was rent by the lightning flash of a bomb's explosion, the thunder of its roar.

The light of morning went out in the lower city, obscured in dust and smoke.

By twelve o'clock the fleet ceased firing at any objective target and sent their bombs in at random. Thereafter the carnage became general over a wider field. The bombs, well effective at a ten-mile range, flew well over the ruined and burning district and reached farther north and east. Mansion, home, hotel, tenement, each and every class of shelter began to feel their fury.

Fresh and wider placed fires sprang up and spread without hindrance. By deliberate purpose all the lower

bridges were destroyed by bombs and the possible ways of escape which they offered for a time cut off.

From the East Side a general movement of the foreign classes began west and north. The fires in the eastern part of the city had grown so numerous as to indicate the complete sweeping of the tenement districts. The denizens seized a few clothes and fled from their threatened warrens. They filled the streets, shrieking and screaming and running.

Hundreds were stricken as they ran. The rest ran on.

As the destruction spread the Japanese ceased firing their bombs and sent up numerous aéroplanes equipped with smaller explosive grenades, which flew over the city in all directions, casting their explosives upon crowds and houses and adding to the demoralization of the helpless wretches who found themselves caught in the maelstrom of fate.

Some of these planes even went as far north as the Harlem bridges and threw bombs upon the travel-congested structures, carrying them down to destruction and hemming in those who sought to fly their doom.

From a bombardment the attack rapidly grew into an unrestrained slaughter of unarmed beings. The city of doom became a place of a thousand fires. A great mushroom of smoke grew and billowed above it. Beneath its somber pall the Japanase planes still flew.

Under the ministrations of Bernice her aunt opened her eyes, and the girl half carried, half dragged her to a couch and lifted her upon it. She seemed utterly prostrated by her faint and spoke feebly, begging her niece to go and leave her, a thing Bernice steadfastly refused to consider.

An hour passed, full of the sounds of the city's destruction. Suddenly into the girl's mind, as she sat waiting for the end she now expected, came a picture from a dream. It was the face and figure of a man. She even smiled as she found herself wondering what Meade Stillman might be doing while the nation's proudest city was ground into ruins.

She wondered if he even knew of the fate his country was facing.

He had said that but once in six months did he leave his oasis in the desert. Had he learned of the war? And if he had, what would he do? What had he done?

If the country had accepted his offer she wondered if perhaps his wonderful ship would have proved a match for these new bombs, which now gave the foe their advantage. Well — she decided that she, at least, would never know.

She supposed that some day he would learn that she was dead. He might even learn how she died, how she and her aunt were caught in a web of fate.

A louder roar filled her ears. In half comprehension she saw the wall back of her aunt's couch crack and break asunder, the solid masonry billowing inward directly toward her.

Then, like a flicker in a motion film, the solid mass broke up, shook itself into bits which loomed black against a great light. A roar grew in her ears, grew and grew, and grew until it became too great for sensing and she forgot everything — hope, fear, and love, and life itself.

After a long time she stirred and moaned. With a great effort she opened her eyes. The pale sunlight of a smoke-clouded sky was pouring in through a ragged

gap in the wall of the room. A great lassitude held her yet and a throbbing pain in her head annoyed.

But with consciousness came recollection, and she looked for her aunt. Where the couch had been was a tumbled mass of brick and plaster and lathing. A sickening fear gripped her heart.

She staggered to her feet and crept dizzily toward that tumbled pile.

Then she stopped and a strangled cry burst from her lips. She had caught sight of a thin hand protruding from beneath a jumble of bricks and a strand of gray hair straggling about a pain-twisted face, pale with the pallor of death.

Choking back her outcry and restraining her wavering senses, Bernice bent above the half-concealed figure and began clawing away the débris which bound the body down. She worked in a sort of half-conscious passion of haste until she freed the slight form and dragged it clear of the wreckage to a place on the floor near where she had sat when the flying bit of the wall had struck and rendered her temporarily unconscious.

She tugged and strained to bring the body so far, and then sank on her knees beside it, drawing its hands over its breast.

A thin trickle of blood had stained the side of the neck from a cut in the temple, but had ceased to flow. The sight of it brought full realization upon her, and she knew that she knelt beside a corpse.

She sprang up and ran to the table in the dining-room, pulling off its cover and returning to cast it over the still thing on the floor. Then, without knowing why, she turned and ran into the hall and up the stairs

to her own room, drew shut the door, and locked it, and threw herself, face downward, on the bed, while sick, dizzy flashes of horror and a sort of nervous nausea wracked and shook her form.

She rose and bathed the bruise on the side of her head where she had been struck when the wall was blown inward. For the first time she wondered how it had come to happen. Later, she came to know that it must have been a bomb from a Japanese plane, which had partially wrecked the house in a manner similar to the fate of many others.

By and by she crept to the window and looked out.

Before her was a restless sea of people. They had run into the open space of the park. The "Green" before her was a swarming mass which moved restlessly, without receding or advancing. Unlike the exodus of the morning, these were of a different type.

For the most part, they were of the foreign population, driven out by fires and falling walls and seeking the seeming partial security of the park as a refuge from the dangers they had fled to escape. Men, women, and children, they stood or sat in huddled masses, their cheap yet gaudy clothing making colorful blotches on the green of the grass.

As she watched their numbers grew.

Fresh refugees came up with each passing minute and joined their fellows in misfortune. And one and all stood and turned their faces into the south, where the great pall of smoke from the burning city stretched in a sulfuric cloud.

From their throats came at least a part of that hoarse cry of fear and hate—that beastlike ululation of human despair.

CHAPTER XII

TO THE RESCUE

WHEN the wireless announced the fall of the Sandy Hook defenses Darling was eating a hasty breakfast. Without waiting to finish his meal, he rang for his car and telephoned his mechanic, ordering him to the hangar where he kept his private aëroplane. Himself he entered the roadster and drove directly back to the Army and Navy Building.

He found its halls filled with hurrying pages and aides and officers of different branches of the service, pervaded by a tense atmosphere of apprehension induced by the latest reports, which told of the passing of the forts by the hostile fleet.

He gave scant heed to any one, however, as he hastened to Gethelds, to find him sitting, stern-lipped and pale, dictating messages and official communications and orders to a group of stenographers.

"I don't want to interrupt you," he said, pausing just inside the door. "I just wanted to tell you I'm going up there and get Biddy. Good-by." He turned away.

"Wait." Gethelds's voice checked him. The colonel came over and put out his hand. "You are going to help me immensely, my boy," he told him, gripping fast the hand he had taken. "I can think better if I know you are with her. Good-by and God bless you. Now, Jones, take this: By the order —"

Darling turned away from a rapid-fire dictation to run back along the congested halls, disregarding the words of many who knew him, dash down the steps of the building, and fling himself into his motor, which stood softly purring. With a wrench he threw in his gears and swung away in the direction of his hangar.

There was a set expression about his mouth and his eyes sparkled. He sent the car along with a rush.

On arrival he found that Jimmy Arkel, his mechanic, had already wheeled the great biplane clear of the shed and was busily fussing over its motor, to assure himself of its perfect condition.

Springing out of the car, he approached over the dew-soaked grass and spoke to the man: "All right, Jim? Is she sweet?"

"Yes, sir. Good morning, sir," responded Arkel. "I've tested her out, and she's fit to a hair. I've filled her tanks and warmed her up a bit. You go up at once?"

"You go with me," said Darling. "And, Jim, get those two small rifles we have here and several clips of shells, and take a couple of automatics for close work. We may need them. We're going to New York."

"New York!" gasped Arkel. "Great! I hear they're fighting up there already. Get aboard, Mr. Darling. I'll be back in a jiff." Turning he ran into the hangar at full speed.

Slipping into leathern coat and goggles, which Arkel had brought outside already, Darling climbed to the pilot's seat. Before he was fully settled Arkel came running back with the rifles and cartridges, which he handed up before beginning to don his own costume for the ascent.

His face wore a nervous excitement, which caused

Darling to nod with satisfaction. In a moment the man was ready.

"Shall I start her?" he asked.

Darling nodded and settled himself more securely in his seat. Arkel ran to the rear, yelled at a couple of assistants, who hurried up and laid steadyng hands on the plane, and started the engine. In a leap he was aboard and crouching down, while the roar of the motor rose in a growing crescendo.

Then, at a wave from Harold's hand, the great plane trundled forward, gained momentum, tilted, and rose against the morning's sun. Beneath it the two assistants stood with backward necks, craning aloft.

"They said they was goin' to N'yark," said one.

"An' there's hell to pay up there," said the other.

They went back and closed the hangar's doors.

Meanwhile, the great Voisin headed steadily into the north and east as Darling drove her, with a wide throttle. Impatience urged the man. Arkel crept close behind him.

"I've loaded the rifles, Mr. Darling," he called close to Harold's ear. "She's going great, ain't she?"

Darling nodded.

"Keep an eye out for any strange planes," he called back. "After we get up toward the city we're apt to have some of the Jap machines up, if my idea is right."

They had left Washington between eight and nine, and he figured that three hours, at most, should bring him within sight of his objective. During the greater part of that time he made no move as he drove, save to shift a lever and nurse his spark and gas.

It was about eleven when both Arkel and he caught

sight of a strange blur on the far horizon, which swelled up like a great storm cloud before them.

A sharp contraction gripped Darling's throat at the sight, and he shot the plane up in order to gain a wider view. As he straightened her out at the greater elevation his eyes came back to the front again.

There, before and below him, was the vast billowing cloud of the burning city.

Its pall of doom shot up and spread before him, and he began to hear faintly the first concussions of the bombs as they burst above the metropolis.

Darling's teeth came together with a snap.

"The fools!" he grated, snarling. "The whole civilized world will turn on them for that. They can't get away with a thing of this sort. When our turn comes God help them; they'll get no mercy."

The Voisin trembled with the throb of her motors as he drove her toward that growing pillar of smoke. Yet, fast as he flew, his fears and his hopes outran his motion. "What of Bernice? Where under that canopy of death and destruction did the girl he had come to save lie? Had she remained at her aunt's? Was her aunt's house still safe?

Urging his machine toward the black veil of ruin, which might billow above her grave, the man knew that he loved her as he would never love any other — as he never wished to love any other.

He was coming closer now. The vast pall had changed to a sulfurous cloud of burning buildings. He shot the plane still higher, intent on riding above it rather than skirting around. Far below, the bay came into view, with the tiny dots — the war-ships which had wrought this destruction, lying like flat water-beetles — motionless upon it.

Two thousand feet above them, he skimmed swiftly over and dashed straight at the nebulous top of the mushroom of smoke.

Its vapors curled about the vanes of the Voisin. The men crouched on the great plane's saddles, sniffed its pungent odor. Arkel unslung a rifle and pumped a cartridge into the breech.

"When we get through this we may bump into one of their little fliers," he suggested with a snarling grin.

Darling nodded. The smoke was biting his throat. He realized he flew in the very top, ballooned out from the lower column, and slanted his vanes, until the plane dived in a long sweep to clear herself of the widespread funeral plume.

They swept clear on the northern side, and almost at once Arkel let out a whoop:

"Hi, Darling! Look out! There's one of them now."

He pointed with excited finger forward and still lower down. Beneath them a smaller plane was rising directly toward them, as though to question their presence. Harold grated his teeth again as he saw that a fleet of American planes would have stood a good chance of scoring against these invaders.

But in all the country, outside of the man with Carton, there were perhaps not more than twenty who could have acted as pilots. Again the country had been caught unprepared. Aloud, he spoke to Arkel: "Try a pot shot at the beggar, Jim."

Arkel grinned and nodded.

He swung up his rifle and fired quickly downward at the rising plane. At his second shot something happened to the Japanese machine. It appeared to stagger, swung to one side, and turned completely over.

"One!" said Darling. Arkel laughed in a way not good to hear.

Darling was scouting for position now.

He peered steadily downward, seeking for the green blot of Central Park. He picked it up after a moment, and began swinging toward it in a long slant, while Arkel kept watch for other Japanese machines.

It was his warning cry which again showed Harold two planes swinging over the lower end of the park. Looking closer, he saw the flash of explosions below them and heard the reverberations of the bursting bombs.

Almost at once Arkel pointed two other planes, farther north, and for the first time Darling swore. "If we dropped there they'd be on us in a minute," he cried to Arkel. "How the devil am I to get close enough to do any good?"

"Where do you want to get, sir?" inquired the man at his back.

"I was going to land in the park opposite Sixty-Eighth," Darling told him, realizing on the instant that Arkel did not know his mission. "There's a girl in a house down there — Miss Gethelds, by the way, Arkel. I came up to get her and take her home, but they've got us in a pocket — worse luck."

"Miss Gethelds?" said Arkel. "The young lady you've taken up a lot this last year? Good Lord! Is she down there?"

Darling nodded and swung the Voisin onto even keel.

"Those fellows see us," declared Arkel, pointing.

He appeared correct, for one of the smaller planes above the southern end of the park had suddenly slanted upward and was rising as fast as its motor could drive it. Darling watched it with interest. Its sudden ac-

tion seemed to have started the beginning of a train of thought in his mind.

For an instant he knit his brows and let the Voisin drift forward, with no endeavor to increase its speed. Meanwhile the second Japanese craft had followed its companion. Both were now rapidly mounting toward the strange machine which they had spied.

Of a sudden Darling nodded. "I fancy I've found the solution, Arkel, old chap," he remarked quite calmly. "There's a saying that a stern chase is a long one. Now if those chaps will follow—"

He broke off and shoved up his spark.

He headed directly westward. As though tied to the Voisin, the rising planes followed in turn. They increased their speed and began closing in, somewhat below and behind, on a steadily rising slant.

Darling led on.

He made no attempt to outdistance the pursuing planes, but kept the Voisin at approximately the same distance, just beyond rifle-shot. So the three swept forward, flashed above the Hudson, and turned toward the south.

"If I can tool them along toward Newark," Harold explained to Arkel, "I'll turn on them somewhere down there. Have your rifles ready, and, when I give the word, shoot fast, and shoot to wound rather than kill. I want one of those planes."

"You want one of *them* planes?" cried Arkel, and lapsed into amazed silence. "Oh, all right," he finished after a moment. He began to examine his weapons, and replaced the two empty shells he had fired.

Of a sudden Darling purposely let the Voisin falter. The more rapid of the two Japanese machines swept

closer. Under Harold's manipulation, the biplane he rode picked up and shot forward again.

But the momentary appearance of hesitation was sufficient to cause the Japanese aviator to believe that his quarry was having motor trouble. He kept doggedly on in pursuit as they fled away into the south.

By now they were approaching the point which Darling had selected for his counter play. He darted forward, began to sink lower, straining his eyes for one of those little market gardens of some eight or ten acres which lie to the west of the city of Newark and which he deemed would offer a suitable spot for landing. In complete unsuspicion the plane behind came on.

Suddenly Harold nodded in satisfaction. His eye had selected a point for landing. It showed beneath them as they flew as an open space surrounded by some small trees with a little house in one corner. He spoke to Arkel: "Now, Jim, wing that chap as we pass."

On the words the Voisin suddenly shifted. She lifted and swung and turned back directly over the little truck-patch below. Taken unawares, the Japanese pilot did not check his course or seek to turn for a moment, and by that time they were bearing down toward him from his own elevation and one side.

With a frantic tug at his levers he sought to turn from their charge, and at that moment Arkel fired.

The Japanese pilot flinched. One of his arms dropped limp and dangled as though its bone were broken. His machine lurched as he lost partial control and swung in a half circle.

Arkel, with his rifle ready, waited until he had a clear shot and fired again. The aviator lurched in his seat, and under Darling's manipulation the Voisin rose and turned back toward the north. Looking down-

ward, Arkel could see the Jap shut off his engine and volplane swiftly downward toward the open spot.

Darling's voice aroused him from his observation. "Good hunting, old chap," said Harold. "Ah! Look. Our other plane must have sensed something unpleasant. He's turned back." He pointed to the second of the two planes which had followed, now nothing but a speck in the north.

Darling brought the plane around again. The Japanese machine was resting on the ground. Harold grinned.

"I wanted that chap to fancy us leaving, so he'd kill his motor and come down all together," he remarked. "He seems to have done so. Ready now, Arkel — you'll have to kill him. Bit nasty, but a necessity of war."

He slanted the biplane downward and let it sweep forward in a sudden swoop.

The Japanese aviator could be seen sitting on the ground seeking to bind his arm with an emergency bandage. As the great plane approached he sprang up, reached hastily for a weapon, and fired pointblank at the sweeping fabric which was coming so swiftly toward him. Arkel, over his sights, could see his face clearly.

It was cold, snarling, sneering, but unafraid. Then he pressed his trigger and the face went out in a bloody mask, which swept out of his line of vision as the Voin sin grounded and slid to a stop.

"Get him?" inquired Harold, as he might have asked for one's score at a trap shoot.

"Y-e-s-s, s-s-i-r," stammered Arkel, suddenly shaken by revulsion.

"Good!" Darling climbed from his seat. "Come

on." He drew a revolver and started back toward the other plane.

The Japanese lay crumpled on the ground, sprawled in a trench beside which the green tops of half-covered celery sprouted. His face was a blood-spattered mass where the high-velocity bullet had crushed its death-dealing way. Darling gave him small attention.

"Take that one side and get its clothes off, then throw some dirt from these celery trenches on it," he directed, and turned to an inspection of the aéroplane.

While Arkel worked at undressing the dead man and throwing earth over the body he examined the Japanese machine carefully for any possible harm it might have sustained. When Arkel brought the uniform of the aviator back over his arm he straightened and looked at his watch.

"Past two," he said shortly. "Come over to the house. I'm rather done. Maybe we can scare up a bit to eat and drink. Bring the clothes."

He stalked stiffly toward the house in the corner of the truck-farm, Arkel following with his burden of clothing. At the door Darling paused and rapped, waited a moment, and pushed against the portal.

It swung inward and showed them the kitchen of the house. Of human presence there was no sign. Then Darling laughed.

He was pointing to a gaudy lithograph on the wall portraying a picture of a ship and captioned by some crooked ideographs. "Jap hut," said he. "The beggars probably deemed it wise to get in closer touch with their countrymen. They evidently feared their neighbors would not feel kindly toward them at present in view of what has occurred. Well — let's see if they left any chow."

He began a rummage of the kitchen in search of food, with the result of some tea, some crackers, a can of tinned meat, and a bag of rice.

"Try your hand at cooking," he suggested, tossing the things to Arkel.

While you're about it, I'll get into these rags you brought. After a bite I'm going to fix a brace or two on that machine and go back to the city. You can stay here."

While Arkel built a fire in the rusty stove and set water to boil for tea he divested himself of his outer clothing and dressed in the Japanese uniform. It was a close fit for his figure, but he succeeded in putting it on. Arkel eyed him in dismay.

"My goodness!" he burst out. "If they catch you in that they'll shoot you for a spy."

Darling chuckled, broke open the carton of crackers, and opened the tin of meat. "If they catch me, I'll be little good for shooting," he returned shortly. "Pour me a cup of tea, and eat something, Jim. I want your help with the machine. After I go, put on some rice to boil and stay here till after dark. If I'm not back by midnight, try to get up and go back to Washington; find Colonel Gethelds and tell him I failed."

"Yes, sir," said Arkel in a small voice. He stuffed his mouth with food and said no more. Yet he eyed Darling as though he wished to speak.

Ten minutes more found them out at the Japanese plane working to rewire several braces strained by the somewhat uncontrolled landing its dead pilot had given it in his wounded condition. While they worked the afternoon drew on, and it was fully four before Darling announced that he was ready to fly.

As he climbed aboard and examined the controls Arkel saw that the tank was filled and took position to start its motor.

At the last Darling drew on his goggles, settled his cap, and laid hold of his levers with a nod. "All right, Jimmy," he directed. "Don't forget to boil that rice, and don't let it burn."

Arkel gulped, seized the propeller, and twirled it over. The engine caught, the plane trembled, shot forward and rose, darting up into the north to become a speck and vanish from sight.

Darling's plan was simplicity itself.

Clad in the uniform of the dead Japanese, and flying one of their planes, he had conceived the idea of flying directly into the city which still smoked before him, getting as close as possible to the house in Sixty-Eighth Street and alighting. Thereafter he would enter the house, and if Bernice were still there, get her quickly to the plane, mount, and seek to win free by a rapid dash.

Fortune favored him in his plans, for an easterly wind was drifting the vast clouds of smoke westward until the sun was only a fiery blot in the pall.

Keeping well down, he skimmed through the half twilight which deepened with each swift minute. It hurt his nostrils, yet still he blessed it for its half-concealing cloak of his movements. He sent the plane straight north and circled when directly opposite the lower end of the park as near as he could judge.

Crossing the Hudson again, he swung east and skimmed forward with a vigilant eye searching for other planes like his own.

Though he did not know it, most of the Japanese machines had either returned to the ships or gone far-

ther afield after their terrible work above the park was done. Finding the field apparently clear, Darling drove on. Suddenly he chuckled.

He had remembered Arkel's face, when he cautioned him not to burn the rice. He sobered instantly, however, as he thought of the girl for whom he had imagined that cereal might prove at least a necessary nourishment should he find her in the captured city.

Scowling, he wrenched at his levers and sank down over the dusk-clouded reaches of the park where the smoke made a strange half light.

After a moment's jockeying he found what he recognized as the open space of the "Green" which Bernice had told him was opposite her windows, and shutting off his motor, he slid down and came to rest.

A fire in the same block as the house he sought threw a light of menace over the street as he reached it and darted across. The door of the house itself was locked and he had no time for rapping or ringing, even if, perhaps, the inmates would pay attention to the summons at such a time.

As he had run up his eye had noted the ragged aperture in the wall made earlier by the bomb. With a sinking heart he realized that the place had been subjected to attack. Now that the door was fast against him, he ran around and scrambled quickly in through the breached wall, drawing his weapon and taking it in his hand.

Within was almost darkness by now.

He stumbled down the pile of indriven bricks and gained the floor, to strike his foot against something soft and yielding as he sought to advance. With a throbbing heart he stooped and bent to examine the thing with which he had come in contact.

In that moment his heart was filled with a vast dread lest this be Bernice herself struck down by the crumbling wall.

With hands that trembled, he drew back the covering from the face and strained forward to see its features, kneeling beside it for closer inspection. The cold mask of an elderly woman stared back at him. With a catching of the breath he covered it up and rose, stepping across it. "God forgive me," said Darling, and paused.

With her aunt dead, where was Bernice? He swept his eyes about the shadowy room and found a door, went to it and on to another room, and yet another, clear to the back. Nowhere did he find trace of the woman he sought.

Retracing his steps, he came again to the front and the foot of a flight of stairs. Ascending these, he found himself in a hallway and paused once more. Within the walls he heard no sound, listen as he might. He admitted with a sinking heart that he seemed to have come too late.

"Bernice!" he called softly. "Bernice!" and paused to listen for her answer. He became aware that he was trembling as he stood there hoping for the sound of a voice.

But it was not what he hoped for that he heard. Instead, sharp, short, and almost instantly strangled came the bark of a dog.

Darling started into attention. The yap of the animal had come from a room at the front end of the hall. Turning, he ran toward it and rapped sharply on its door.

"Bernice!" he called in a voice whose poor control surprised him. "Bernice — little sister!"

He heard movement in the room — the sound of footsteps which hesitated inside the door. Her voice came to him, half doubting, half believing: "Harold — is it really you?"

"Yes. Open the door," he burst out in shaking relief, and waited until the door swung open and showed him the shadowy outlines of her figure against the pale windows at her back. "Bernice!" he cried out again, and reached out his arms.

She came into them like one fleeing to refuge and clung to him with fast gripping hands. "Harold! Harold!" she panted. "How did you get here?" "How — how!"

"I flew. Didn't I tell you I would?" said Darling, gathering her to him and laughing with excitement. "And we must get away. Put something over your head and get a coat. If any one finds my plane —"

"Yes, yes!" The girl seemed to understand the vital need of haste. She freed herself from his embrace and ran back into the room. In another instant she was back with a heavy jacket and a scarf which she began winding about her hair and face.

The little white Spitz trotted at her side. Suddenly she stooped and caught him up. "Can we take it?" she asked, as she cuddled it to her. "It was my aunt's. Oh, poor auntie — she was killed — by a wall. It fell in."

"Bring him along," assented Darling. "He's earned it. He led me to you. Come, dear." He turned back toward the stairs, gripping her arm.

"I was so frightened when he barked," said Bernice, as they ran down to the ground floor. "I tried to make him stop. If I could have dreamed it was you —"

"I said I would come," Darling reminded, and swung open the door to the street.

Outside the dusk had deepened as they stole across the avenue into the park. In silence they made their way to where the plane rested in shadowy outline. He helped her aboard and lifted the dog into her arms.

Opening the throttle ever so little, he ran around and started the engine, ran back and leaped aboard as the plane trundled drunkenly forward over the horribly combered "Green."

He threw the engine wide open and sent the plane up into the darkening air. Behind him Bernice crouched, leaning forward against the drag of the wind, the dog clutched in her arms.

Harold turned westward and then south. They skimmed like a great night bird across the sky. Only once Bernice spoke as they shot forward. "Poor auntie — it seems awful — heartless to leave her this way."

Darling shook his head. "There was a fire in your block. It was spreading. It will doubtless furnish her sepulchre," he said.

It was dark when he sank into the truck-path near the house whose window showed a tiny light. As he led her across the uneven ground the door opened and Arkel showed before them. He was peering out, a rifle clasped in his hand.

"It's all right, Jim," Darling called softly. "Did you boil that rice?"

Arkel was grinning when they came in. "I did that," he announced, and turned away to stoke up the stove. Darling led Bernice to a chair and bade her sit down. "If you're hungry, I can offer you tea, crackers, and plain rice," he suggested. "The bill is restricted, but it will nourish."

Bernice nodded. Suddenly she sensed that she was

hungry. "I have fasted all day," she admitted. "Mr. Arkel is a jewel to have prepared food for us."

"He hasn't anything else to do," smiled Harold as he turned toward the stove where Arkel had set a kettle. He lifted the lid and whistled softly. "Good Lord, man! How much did you cook?"

"About a quart, sir," said Arkel. "It swelled."

"Swelled?" grinned Darling. "Biddy, he's got rice for a regiment."

For the first time that day the three indulged in a wholesome laugh in which pure amusement lurked.

An hour later, rested and fed, they went out to the Voisin, and succeeded in getting it up. Once well under way, Harold turned its running over to Arkel who had been muttering threats of vengeance against the Japanese for an hour, and crept back beside Bernice.

Without a word he reached out and drew her into his arms, and felt her head drop back against him.

In the north and east a ruddy cloud in the darkness marked the funeral pyre of the nation's proudest city. It rose a pillar of fire by night, as it had stood a pillar of smoke by day. It was a signal fire to the nation to rally against a foe.

The light of its menace reached from ocean to ocean and from lake to gulf, and welded the people as nothing else could have done.

But to Darling, seated on the great plane, holding Bernice like a tired child, speaking of his coming to her rescue — telling her all the story, and listening to her own, its portent was for the moment well-nigh forgotten. For that one time he was lifted over all else save her presence.

So far as he was concerned, the three hours' flight back to her home became the idyl of a hungry heart!

CHAPTER XIII

AN EXTREME WAR MEASURE

A **WHITE** mist was rising from the Potomac, and drifting in over the lower city as Darling put Bernice down at her home and walked slowly with her to the door.

"You are safe now, little sister," he said as he set a finger on the bell.

The door opened as a maid answered the summons. Bernice passed the threshold. "Won't you come in?" she questioned in a wistful way, as Darling remained outside.

He shook his head.

"I must get on," he decided. "I've an idea they will want my report on conditions, as an eye-witness, and I want to tell your father you're safe. He is anxious."

"Dear old dad," said the girl. "Tell him I am all right, and that I owe my life to you. And tell him—that aunty—died at once—she didn't suffer. I cannot thank you, big brother—in words. But I thank you in my soul, if you know what that means."

He nodded, without words, lifted his cap, and ran down to the roadster, which had brought them from the hangar to the house. The girl watched him as he drove away. She began to weep softly, in reaction—perhaps.

Turning his car toward the Government buildings, Harold repeated this question to himself: "How soon will our turn come?"

* * *

'As the plane, which bore the girl, and Arkel, and himself, had skimmed above the city, he had seen that the capital blazed with light — that the office buildings of the House and Senate were starred with pin point rows of brilliance; and he knew that Congress was in midnight session.

The fall of New York, vaunted as impregnable to attack, had wrought a crisis. He knew even as he drove the roadster, that when he came to them he would find the Executive Mansion and the Army and Navy building ablaze with light; filled with white-faced, set-lipped men, who sought to plan the meeting of this crisis so suddenly arisen.

His inquiries for Gethelds at the rooms of the board sent him back to the White House, where the board's head was closeted with the highest heads of the nation. His name presented there brought him face to face with the man he sought. His face was wan, tired, lined with anxiety for his child and his country.

His eyes alone flashed with a more than normal fire.

He came forward with eager haste. "Darling—" he began and paused as though loath to voice the question, which should mean so much.

Harold smiled. "Safe at her home, colonel," he answered the unspoken appeal, and put out a hand as the colonel reeled.

Gethelds stood for a moment with bowed head. His lips moved in inaudible words. On a sudden he straightened and seized Darling's hand and wrung it.

"My boy, my boy," he faltered. "You found them?"

"Biddy, colonel," Harold told him slowly. "Your sister was killed by a falling wall in her own home before I got there. She died instantly, Biddy says."

"God gives me my child at least, and the nation the young life," said the colonel. Turning, he led the way back to the President's office.

It was full of men, stern-faced, beneath the lights. President Gilson, pale, his face supported on one curled hand, sat at the head of the table, about which the Cabinet were grouped. Facing him, from the foot of the table, a man in uniform was speaking, but paused for a moment and glanced inquiringly about as Darling followed Gethelds in.

It was Colonel Gotz. In a moment he resumed:

"Sir, with all respect for Secretary Garrison's suggestion, and all he says in support of the plan, it is a useless waste of lives, and would result in but weakening our waning defenses by just that much more."

Gethelds interrupted as Gotz paused and presented Darling. "Mr. Darling is just from New York," he explained, "and can possibly advise us better than any one else." He turned to Harold. "The point under discussion was the advisability of a night attack by our planes on their fleet."

"And how many planes for immediate service have you?" inquired Harold.

"Six." Gotz spoke shortly.

"Impossible," said Harold. "If it were fifty, yes. But six? It would be useless."

"My opinion exactly," said Gotz quickly. "My father and I discussed the same point only this afternoon."

"It remains then, gentlemen," the Secretary of War spoke up, "to strengthen the defenses of this city, mine the river well below the forts, and equip the Wright machines which should arrive to-morrow, provided they give us time to do it. Privately, however, I should ad-

vise all preparations for the transfer of the government to an inland point."

President Gilson winced.

A spasm crossed his face, but he did not move from his position or speak. His attitude suggested rather that he was waiting for the others to voice their expressions of opinion first.

Gethilda rose.

"That is, after all, the right idea, I believe," he began. "What we must have is time to readjust ourselves. The blows have come upon us with such swiftness that we are unbalanced. We must gain a brief breathing time as it were. Strengthen Washington by all means if it be possible, but prepare to evacuate it quickly if the need arises, as we all here know that it probably will.

"At present we are rendered well-nigh defenseless by a superior weapon, and we must devise means to restore the balance. I might suggest that if possible the Western troops be instructed to endeavor in every way to obtain one of these bombs, unexploded, that it may be examined, on the chance that we can duplicate or improve upon it —"

"That would take months," interrupted Secretary Ryan. "It is my belief that after what they have accomplished Japan will now seek terms."

"What terms?" asked Manuels.

"Recognition to equal citizenship rights, perhaps; property rights of tenure, and government guarantee of the same."

"And you would favor an accession to such demands?" Garrison scowled.

"There has been too much blood-shed already, sir," the Secretary of State replied.

"Dad was advising some such negotiations this after-

noon," suggested Colonel Gotz. "He realizes the demoralizing effect on business, and property values, which this war must have, unless cut short. He mentioned their full admission to citizenship rights, as Secretary Ryan has done. He thinks that will settle the war at once."

Darling sprang up.

"Your pardon, Mr. President," he cried. "But I want to answer that inane bit of property interest twaddle. If Colonel Gotz had been with me to-day I do not fancy he would speak of offering citizenship to the Japanese. He would say as I do: Fight! Fight to the last ditch, and then fight! Citizenship to those fiends, who revert to the methods of the dark ages, who slaughter the helpless like cattle."

"Mr. Darling, I scarcely consider you qualified to speak in this discussion," said Ryan.

Gethelds resumed.

"Permit me to finish my remarks. I would further advise in need that we use the same tactics which Russia used against the great Napoleon — that we retreat inland and allow Japan to assume the task of bringing the war to us. In the meantime we can prepare for the final stand, regain our breath, and strengthen our determination.

"Mr. Darling himself suggested to me some days ago that if the worst happened, as it seems it has, we could make this war insupportable to Japan by adopting a campaign of minor rather than massed resistance. To-day their success lies in the effectiveness of these bombs against massed resistance. Against small and mobile columns they would be far less effective.

"The advantage of complete knowledge of the country, and the ease of movement would lie with the small

column, which could harass their armies and withdraw at will. The entire country, which they will apparently seize, could be patrolled by small bands under a hundred competent men, who would make their occupation of the country a thing of constant effort and terrible cost in money and men."

President Gilson nodded, and straightened in his chair. His eyes flashed. He turned to Darling. "You would favor such a move?" he said.

"Without reservation, yes," the Virginian replied. "More. I would recommend that before we abandon the seaboard, we destroy the principal port cities. We cannot defend them, as has been proven. But—we can make them valueless to Japan. The troops which they will land can be compelled to land upon a half-deserted and unresourceful region. It is a terrible step to take, but it would give us delay, and delay is the thing we must have."

Barrison nodded in complete acquiescence. "They couldn't win against such tactics in a thousand years," he declared.

"Quixotic," said Ryan sharply. "Granted that it might win in the end, think of the property loss involved. Do you imagine that the people in those sections affected would sanction such a move? We do not expect the citizen to sacrifice his property to the nation nowadays, nor even his way of making a living."

"You expect the soldier to sacrifice his life," Barrison rejoined. "A citizen might do less."

"I still look for a proposal of terms in a day or two," said Secretary Ryan.

"And they must be considered. We cannot afford to bankrupt this country because of any sentimental theory," added Gotz.

President Gilson rose. He leaned slightly forward and began to speak slowly, driving each word into the brains as well as the ears of his hearers.

"Yet there may come a time in the life of a nation when lack of sentimental theory spells ruin and decay as surely as would be wrought by martial defeat. Such terms as Japan will offer, and I admit that I believe that will constitute her next move will be, drastic, without question. She stands in the position of victor.

"She will ask for much. I for one do not think we will be able with honor to grant her demands. Remains then the question of alternative. The one other course is to refuse. To me the plan outlined by Colonel Gethelds and Mr. Darling appeals. Let us consider the laying waste of a strip one hundred miles wide along the eastern seaboard and the gulf to the Mexican line.

"Let us patrol that district with flying columns, which may hover on their army's flanks. Let us hover about them with aeroplanes, which shall come and do their damage and depart when least expected. Let us show to them, and to the world, that America does not yield to the first demand, or the first reverse. Let us consider Japan's expected proposition, and then unless it is consistent with our honor, let us hurl it at their feet as a gauntlet, and make the ultimate sacrifice to save our national integrity."

With that the meeting broke up.

Barrison went back to his office to issue orders for defending Washington. Darling took Gethelds home in his car, and on his invitation remained for the rest of the night. Late as it was, Bernice and the two men talked for an hour ere they tried for a little rest.

They spoke of those things which had transpired,

and of what might come, and of the probable demands of Japan. And they spoke of the death of Gethelds's sister, and of the saving of Bernice.

Gotz hastened to his father's house, and briefly informed J. C., who was waiting, of what had transpired. "Barrison, the fool," said he, "wanted to send the planes against their fleet. It would have meant death. I saw enough of their work in the West. I've had enough of it, dad. Even Darling had sense enough to see it was useless."

"Darling's no fool," his father responded. "He's a secret service man, boy. That developed while you've been gone. You say Gilson's gone up to the House? Well — that's where I ought to be too, only I was afraid of some business of this sort, and I waited to see you. Someway we've got to head off this fool notion of Gethelds' and his. This country can't afford any more war. I'll take your car and go up. You go to bed."

J. C. appeared on the floor of the House in time to answer the President's advisory suggestions.

His remarks raised an immediate burst of discussion, which raged with bitterness for hours. In the Senate an associate of his established a similar opposition. So the night of the fourteenth passed.

On the morning of the fifteenth a Japanese destroyer steamed up the Potomac under flag of truce. Secretary Ryan's prophecy was fully upheld in the fact that she carried envoys, authorized to present terms for an armistice, for the consideration of terms of peace, offered by Japan.

As soon as notified of the vessel's arrival the Cabinet assembled and admitted the envoys to audience. They presented their papers, stated that they would give

twenty-four hours for consideration before demanding an answer, and withdrew to their vessel. It was not until after their departure that the terms were opened and read.

As President Gilson had suggested, they were drastic. Opening with a demand for full recognition of all citizens of Japan to full citizenship rights in the United States, with rights of naturalization, they continued with a demand for full rights of property tenure, under government guarantee to Japanese not naturalized as citizens of the United States.

They demanded further the neutralization of the Canal Zone and the establishment of a governing board for its control, to be composed of one representative from each civilized nation whose vessels might desire to use the canal, and the establishment of a community interest in the same, both as to ownership and upkeep.

They asked further for the cession to Japan of the entire Philippine group and of the Hawaiian Islands, and further for the establishment of a buffer State between the United States and Mexico, to extend from a line drawn north from the mouth of the Rio Grande to the Red River, thence to the western line of Oklahoma, thence north to the Kansas line, thence west through the States of New Mexico, Arizona, and California to the Pacific Ocean; this state to be under the suzerainty of Japan, and governed by a resident viceroy, appointed by the Imperial Government at Tokyo.

And as a climax it demanded a special act of Congress, recognizing the Japanese claims to descent from Aryan rather than Mongol stock, which should establish them as a Caucasian people, and recognizing the full rights of intermarriage between themselves and all

persons of both sexes in the United States. It further contained a clause stating that the acceptance of the proposed armistice would carry an understood willingness to accept all or none of the provisions of the proposed treaty.

Even Secretary Ryan winced at some of the terms. As for his associates, they were practically speechless for the moment.

President Gilson announced his intention of transmitting the terms to Congress amid an absolute silence.

"I cannot believe," said he, "that a representative body of American citizens will meekly accede to any such demands without further continuance of the struggle. The last clause alone is an insult to our womanhood, if nothing more. For generations we have boasted of our noble women and of our readiness to defend them against the world.

"This clause amounts to our subscribing to an Orientalization of our race—to the waiving of our birthright. Myself I had rather slay my daughters than see them given over to such an alliance. I shall advise resistance to an ultimate degree. I shall say as much to Congress and make public these terms through the press.

"I think I know what the country will answer. Gentlemen, to you I leave the preparation for the removal of this country's government to an inland point. In my opinion we have no other course left. From this moment let us work together as American citizens."

Barrison sprang to his feet in dramatic fashion. "Gentlemen," he cried hoarsely, "shall we not now subscribe to our President's action and suggestions? Can we sit passive under the insult of this note? Shall we not rather unite to uphold him and prove our right to

the places of trust which we hold, forgetting all else save the country?"

They rose to him and stood in affirmation, one after another, until Secretary Ryan alone remained in his chair. His great face was working and his lips quivered as from actual pain. Very slowly, as they turned their eyes upon him, he moved and rose and stood.

"Gentlemen," he said in a choked voice, "I have hoped and my hope lies broken. Man of peace as I am, I cannot subscribe to the dismemberment of my country, to the disgrace of her women, to a recognition such as they ask. Gentlemen, President Gilson, I am with you."

A sigh rippled the assemblage.

A smile flitted over Gilson's lips. "I am glad, William," he said softly. "Very glad. I am going to the Capitol now. Will you come with me?"

The published terms woke a wail of horrified protest over the entire nation, and carried down all the Gots opposition in the House and Senate.

With the envoys a policy of delay was adopted. When they appeared for their answer they were met with a request for a forty-eight-hour extension for the preparation of counter proposals. They acceded after a few moments' argument and retired.

A rigid censorship of the press prevented the real purpose of the government from becoming public property too soon. The time so gained was used in the transfer of currency and government records. This work was carried on with great secrecy, and the populace themselves did not know that it was being done.

At the end of the second period the envoys came back and received their reply, which was in the nature of a total refusal. Not one of their well-controlled faces

showed the slightest emotion over the result. Quite without expression they rose and bowed.

"We depart," declared one of their number. "As the Germans say — *auf wiedersehen* — we are comin' back." Bowing himself to the ground he retreated backward from the chamber. His companions closed around him and bowed.

Such, then, was the situation. Instantly on the retirement of the envoys on their vessels telegrams were sent to all the large coastal cities, instructing the government representatives to proclaim their evacuation, and after forty-eight hours' time for the inhabitants to vacate, to set them on fire.

Never for a hundred years had such a step been taken by a nation. Yet it was accomplished with far less disturbance than might have been expected. For once the people seemed to realize the ultimate necessity of the act. Before the Japanese fleet, proceeding with caution up the Chesapeake and the Potomac, came within range of the forts, the City of Washington was well nigh abandoned.

All government officials and clerks had departed westward.

The vast funds of the nation had already been sent away. The better class citizens had gone thither and yon — to other sections. There remained but those who had no place to go, or did not hesitate to fraternize with the newcomers.

The forts which guarded the approaches were voiceless before the invaders, their guns dismantled, their magazines despoiled.

In the other cities affected the thing was done as outlined. In their ordained order they smoked and fell. Their people scattered by government order, they were

fired and their destruction rendered complete by government agents.

While the world stood aghast the nation deliberately made her zone of military backfire wide.

By the time the Japanese landed their army, long hid in Mexico, on the eastern seaboard, they faced a wide field of country well nigh barren, across which they must advance. For once the Americans had taken a leaf from Japan's own book and acted with despatch.

Not only did the invaders meet this unexpected condition, but already numerous men had organized bands of their fellows, thrown out of other employment by the exigency of the government action, and to these open commissions were granted wherever applied for. The bands were armed and equipped by the nation and began a systematic harassment of the several Japanese columns.

Nor was the government idle while their flying columns in independent commands harried the invaders. Every munition factory in the inland country was taken over under contract with its owners and ran night and day to supply arms and munitions to the rapidly growing army.

As quickly as enlisted men were sent to various concentration camps, the largest of which was near Pittsburgh, and there welded into regiments and divisions.

While the enemy undertook to establish himself in the country upon which he had landed, the nation prepared steadily for an offensive movement. At the same time it became constantly more and more apparent that the struggle must be one of indeterminate duration.

Secretary Ryan's prediction — that saving a miracle it would last for years — seemed in a fair way to be justified.

CHAPTER XIV

BERNICE CONFERS WITH THE PRESIDENT

THIS was the position on the 1st of November: The United States had by a tremendous sacrifice gained that breathing time which it required to gather its resources and combat the unexpected invasion.

But with the exception of the Puget Sound district it had lost its seaboard, which was now in the hands of the power which had attacked. Driven back, forced inward, the country stood with its back to the Canadian wall on the north and faced its foes on three sides — east, south, and west.

It was of such things that Bernice and Darling spoke one evening in early November as they sat in the home which Gethelds had found for his child and himself in Chicago. It was chilly, and a gas-log was blazing in the grate, before which their chairs were drawn up.

Bernice had not seen Darling for a week.

He had but just returned from a government mission, of which more than one had held him off and on since the hurried departure from Washington. Of Gotz, now stationed in his home town, organizing and training volunteer air men, she had seen much more.

He had even offered her father and herself entertainment in the Gotz home on the Lake Front, but they had neither one cared to accept. Now Harold chuckled grimly:

“They’re up against something rather different to what they expected,” said he, referring to the Japanese

armies. "They certainly did not look for our retreat in the way it was delivered, and these guerrilla methods exasperate them in the same way a fly does a sleeping man. I remember Barrison said they would not be able to advance across the abandoned strip in a thousand years, and it begins to look as though he had been right."

"But they still hold the country," returned Bernice. "We have held them in check, as we hoped, but we have gained little and lost so much. Where will it end, big brother?"

She clasped her hands about a knee and lifted her eyes to his.

"God knows, Biddy!" said the man.

They sat on. The gas purred slightly in the log, sending out blue ribbons of flame. The girl sat, still clasping her knee, her supple torso bent slightly forward from her hips, looking into the fire.

"Harold," she asked finally, "do you remember the time Meade Stillman came to Washington with his strange machine?"

"Do I? By Jove, yes!" said Darling.

"Do you know much about his machine?" continued Bernice.

"Only what I heard," replied Darling. "From that it was worth its weight in diamonds and was supposed to be capable of destroying anything not too deeply buried."

"What do you suppose such a machine could do against the Japanese?" Bernice shot the question at him quickly.

His eyes widened and he straightened. "If it would do what they said he claimed, it would play ducks and drakes with the beggars."

"Really?" She leaned toward him. "Really, Harold?"

"Quite possibly, I should say. Whatever became of that chap, Biddy?"

"He went away."

"Yes, I knew that. You know Gotz tried to have him trailed by secret service agents. They lost the trail."

"And if such a machine were built," Bernice continued, "and would do what was claimed, you think it would overcome the advantage the Japanese now possess in these bombs?"

"I believe so. Why?"

"Harold," said the girl slowly, "after Meade Stillman went away he wrote me — a letter. In it he told me that he was going to work to make money in order to clear his father's name from the suspicion to which Mr. Gotz alluded that night at the dinner. And before he went away, that same night, he told me all about his home and the little town where they went each six months for supplies.

"And he said it was thirty-five miles from the place where they lived in the desert, and that there were two great mountain peaks, thirty-five miles northwest of where his home was. And the postmark on the letter was that of a town in southeastern Utah, and the atlas shows two great mountains near it. So you see I know where he is, within thirty-five miles, about."

She paused, her eyes glowing as she made her point. Then she continued: "In his letter to me he wrote that if ever his country had need of him — if there was anything he could do for it — he would come back. So I think if he knew he was needed now — if he knew how dreadfully he was needed —"

"Exactly," Darling interrupted. "You think he don't know — that he's buried in his desert and doesn't know what has happened?"

"Something like that — yes."

"And this town — where he mailed the letter?" A growing excitement showed in Darling's tones.

"In confidence, Harold," Bernice cautioned. "Remember, his father's name is not cleared yet. The town is Hite. It stands on the west bank of the Colorado River, ninety-five miles south of the main line of the Rio Grande railroad. I know, for I worked it out in the atlas from the scale of miles when his letter first came."

"It would take months to build his machine," said Darling slowly. "Still, we can keep on playing tag with their forces this winter — keep them stewing. If the chap would consider the proposition it could do no harm to have him looked up. I'll take the matter up with Gilson himself, if you like."

Bernice sat forward, her hands locked in her lap. "Will you do more than that? Will you take me to President Gilson, Harold?"

"When?"

"Now — to-night. Will you?"

"Isn't this rather sudden?" temporized Darling.

"Yes," said the girl. "There's a telephone in the next room. Call up the President and tell him you must see him on urgent business."

"You're serious?" Darling met her squarely.

She lifted her eyes, dilated now until their grayness had turned to black, and met his questioning glance. To the man it seemed that her very stature grew and became compelling, overruling, with a strange, almost unnatural power.

"Harold," she said, giving each word its full meaning, "I am serious — yes. I believe that to-night it was given to my woman's intuition to see the way of our salvation. I believe that I am an instrument in the hands of Fate to bring this thing about."

The man nodded. "And you will put it over," he declared with conviction, rising. "Right, then, I'll call up Gilson."

He seated himself and drew the telephone to him. For five minutes he spoke softly over the wire, hung up, and came back to the room where Bernice waited. She had used the time of his conversation to good advantage.

He found her wrapped in a squirrel skin coat, whose ruddy tones well nigh matched the coils of her hair, upon which had set a little hat of the selfsame fur. She rose to meet him, and he nodded. Together they went into the hall and down the street where Harold's roadster, driven overland from Washington by Arkel, stood ready at the curb.

Harold tucked her in and took his place at her side. They rolled smoothly away through the night streets of the city. Its thoroughfares were thronged with people, busy with motors and surface cars, its windows brilliant with light.

To one who did not know it would scarcely have appeared as the capital of a country menaced by a possible destruction.

With the adaptability of their kind, the people of the country had come to accept the situation after the first dreadful shock of surprise was past. Driving over the far-stretched pavements it seemed almost bizarre to Darling to think that they two — himself and the tender woman at his side — were starting on a venture

as crowded with romance in its way as any old-time story, in a fashion so prosaic.

His thoughts kept him silent as he drove swiftly to the residence President Gilson had selected for his own — no more nor less than a floor in one of the city's chief hotels.

He swung the roadster in to the curb and helped Bernice to the pavement, turned and led her in and across the brilliantly lighted lobby to the elevator bank. A car had just come down and he handed her aboard, not entirely unmindful that the advent of himself and the beautiful woman who was his companion had attracted considerable attention from the crowds which filled the foyer.

The car shot them to the upper floor of the hotel, and they emerged into a hallway, laid with a rich velvet carpet, which led them to the door pointed out by a uniformed hall-boy, who also eyed with interest the well-groomed man and softly trailing woman, who came so late to call upon the President.

A doorman answered their ring and seated them while he went to announce their arrival.

Returning he led them through several other rooms to a large apartment in the corner of the floor, through the windows of which the vast lighted area of the city looked in and announced them to the man, who sat there at a desk.

President Gilson rose as Harold motioned Bernice to precede him. His face lighted as his eyes swept the feminine vision before him, and he left his desk and advanced half-way to meet her, stretching out a welcoming hand.

"My dear Miss Gethelds, I am honored," he greeted. "I could scarcely believe Darling's assurance that it

was you in person who wished to call upon me, and I confess I have spent the time of waiting in various conjectures as to how I might serve you. Pray take this chair."

He waved her to a padded seat placed close beside the desk.

Bernice sank down and opened her coat before she spoke. Her eyes fastened upon the President's face and never left it while her fingers fumbled with the frogs of her wrap. It seemed that for the first time she was appraising the man before her.

Suddenly she nodded. "President Gilson, I did not come for myself, but for our country," she said.

"For our country?" repeated Gilson. "Really, I fear I do not understand."

"Didn't Harold tell you the object of our call?" queried Bernice.

"He stated merely that the occasion was important," replied the President.

Bernice smiled.

"Which shows your kind consideration, President Gilson. Just how much do you know of a military device some time offered to this country by a man named Stillman?"

Gilson threw an involuntary glance at his fair inquisitor before he answered: "I know considerable of its theory and the history of its presentation from your father, Miss Gethelds."

"And, perhaps, the reason why the matter went no further?" said Bernice.

"I understood that the matter met with opposition," Gilson made guarded return.

Miss Gethelds nodded and sat forward. "Mr. President, from your knowledge of what the Stillman machine

was, what would you imagine its effectiveness against the Japanese?"

Gilson knit his brows. "Really — that is hard to answer," he replied slowly. "Your father seemed to think it was a wonderful thing. If it could do what its inventor claimed, it would certainly give us a tremendous advantage.

"Still, I fail to see how we can consider the matter, my dear young lady, because after he left Washington in what, I understand, was disgust at his treatment, Mr. Stillman seems to have disappeared. Your father told me that all efforts to trace him had failed."

"President Gilson," said Bernice, "you once remarked that if this country needed so strange a thing, you would expect a miracle to come to its rescue. I am only a woman, but I believe that I can bring that miracle to you. As it happens, I know where Mr. Stillman went."

"But your father —" the President began.

"My father did not know that I possessed the knowledge. I told no one. As you may have heard, Mr. Stillman's father went to the place where he now lives to escape arrest for a crime with which he was charged — unjustly charged as I believe. Yet before he went away Meade Stillman described his home in a general way to me, and afterward he wrote me a letter. I can find him, I am sure."

"And you think he would place his invention at the nation's service?" A tremor crept into Gilson's voice.

"Before he went, and afterward when he wrote, he assured me that if ever the nation needed, he would come back," replied Bernice.

"Did you know about this before?" Gilson turned to Darling.

"Not until to-night," said Harold.

The executive nodded.

"Once more you have proved your value to the country by bringing Miss Gethelds to me," he remarked.

Darling smiled. "Not at all," he retorted. "As it happens, sir, Miss Gethelds insisted upon my obtaining this interview at once."

"The idea is yours?" Gilson bent his eyes on the girl.

"Yes. I bring you the miracle."

For a time no one spoke. Gilson half turned away and let his glance wander out of the window over the twinkling lights of the city. He seemed weighing the situation fully before voicing an opinion. Bernice leaned back in her chair and let her eyes wander from one man to the other. Gilson swung round.

"Miss Gethelds," said he, "sometimes in great crises I think that those who feel deeply may speak with prophetic tongues. When I spoke, weeks ago, of a miracle to happen, I had no thought of the things you have mentioned. But God knows that as head of this nation I would not knowingly overlook a chance for her advantage, and should this Stillman machine justify the young man's claims it is a miracle indeed."

"And it is fitting that you — a woman — one of the women of this nation — in which womankind is vaunted and revered as in no other in all the world — should be the agency through which our salvation comes.

"Darling"—he turned to Harold—"you will take such steps as may be necessary to locate this Stillman and lay proposals before him. It will take time to equip these machines, and in the meantime we must continue to hold our own as best we may. You will act at once. Has Miss Gethelds given you the address?"

"Yes, sir," said Darling. "And the proposals we shall make?"

"Ask him to name his terms — then accept them," Gilson replied. "This is no time to quibble."

"One moment," interrupted Bernice, who sat silent during Gilson's words. "President Gilson, it will not do to send just any one to Mr. Stillman. The one who goes must be one who has his complete confidence, some one who knows him and whom he knows. There must be no chance for him to feel suspicion of the motives which are behind the proposition. The need is too great."

"Is he acquainted with Mr. Darling?" inquired the President.

"Yes," said Miss Gethelds. "He met Harold at our house."

"You will go yourself, Darling," Gilson directed. "I shall take the full responsibility in this matter."

Again Bernice leaned forward. Her face grew vibrant with purpose, and her words came fast.

"President Gilson, you do not fully comprehend. While in Washington Mr. Stillman gave me his confidence. He is a peculiar man, unlike any other I ever met. He loves his country yet his country has not dealt very well by him. He went into exile with his father when a child. He has lived alone with his father in the desert ever since, save for his one visit East with this machine.

"He is an educated man without any real experience in life, a man in years and mental power, a child in sophistication — an idealist. He came East and he went back, with a soul wounded by the treatment he received. He was accused of selfish purpose — his father's alleged crime was hurled in his face — his plans to give strength

to his nation were destroyed through selfish interests by a man incapable of patriotic motive. You know, sir, whom I mean. It was Congressman Gotz who insulted Meade Stillman in our house.

"But before he went away he told me that if ever our country had need of him — or if I should ask it — he would come back. That is what I meant a moment ago when I said some one must go in whom he would have confidence. I do not believe that any man could do it. You don't need a man for this — you need a woman."

"And that woman?" A soft smile played on the President's lips.

"Must be myself."

"Impossible!" Darling started forward in protest. Gilson nodded slowly. Bernice turned her eyes to Harold.

"Why?"

"You couldn't make such a trip — into the desert — a hundred miles from a railroad."

"You would go with me," said Bernice.

For a moment a quiver shook Darling's inmost being. For a moment his pulses leaped, and began to race madly at the prospect, and what it involved of companionship and trust. The next moment he forced back the picture, which allured, and spoke:

"And you couldn't do that, either, Bernice. Just now you're carried along by impulse. The idea is beyond consideration."

She lifted her eyes and met his gaze fully. A tiny smile curled her soft lips. "Convention?" she inquired. "Is that what you mean?"

She turned back to the President, who sat studying the two. "I wonder, President Gilson, how well you

know Harold Darling? No matter, I have known him all my life. If this thing is to be brought about, it is I who must go to Meade Stillman and tell him his country needs him. And I cannot go alone. I must have a protector and a helper, and I have him to hand. I know Mr. Darling, and I know him for as brave a man, as tender a gentleman, as trustworthy an agent as this country can claim, not even excepting yourself. With him I should be as safe as with a brother. I even call him brother when we are together, and *he* speaks to me of convention. Oh, Harold!" She threw back her head and began to laugh.

The keen eyes in the face of the older man had not been idle while she was speaking. The lips above his firm chin settled into purpose. "I agree with Miss Gethelds that she would be utterly safe with you, Darling," he said dryly. "Does your father know this?"

"He does not," returned Harold. "The whole thing is prepos—"

"Is glorious," Gilson cut him short. "The whole thing is a splendid example of what a true woman will do for the cause she feels is right. Miss Gethelds, will your father sanction this?"

"I am of age," said Bernice quickly. "My father is a soldier."

Gilson nodded. "Outline your plan," he said with decision. "I accept for the nation."

Bernice rose and slipped from her coat. With rapid motion she crossed the room to where a great map of the country hung against the wall. Pausing before the section devoted to Utah, she ran a finger along the line of a railway.

"The Rio Grande," she said. "You can see how it strikes west and north across the State, and that here

as it curves it strikes through a little station marked 'White House.' From White House we will take an aëroplane and fly ninety-five miles southwest. And from there thirty-five miles southeast will bring us close to the little oasis where we will find Meade Stillman. And then — then — the miracle will happen!"

"Magnificent!" President Gilson breathed the word rather than spoke it. "Feasible, Darling," he said to Harold. "Miss Bernice, I accept your offer in the name of your country, with a full faith that you will succeed. And to that success I shall contribute all I may. Within an hour I shall have a special train with a private car waiting you at the Northwestern Station. It will carry you to this White House and wait for your return. Darling — will your Voisin be suitable for the flight from White House?"

"Probably not, sir," Harold decided. "In that higher air we'll need something more of the Curtiss type."

"Then I shall have a machine of that sort sent forward with you," Gilson promised.

"Come," said Bernice. "Take me home, Harold. I must leave word for daddy and get some things." She turned toward her coat.

The President himself lifted and held it for her and folded it across her breast. With a handgrip for Darling and a glance of something like veneration for Bernice, he escorted them to the door.

"Madness," said Harold as he started the car and turned it toward the Gethelds' home. His voice was choked.

"Madness?" said the girl at his side. "Perhaps. But a grand and uplifting, a sublime madness, big brother." Her voice thrilled him until he gripped the

wheel with savage force to still the tremor of his emotions.

"Come back quickly," she told him at the door, refusing to let him dismount. "I'll be ready in half an hour."

He drove to his own apartments and began a hasty packing of his aviation clothing and other belongings. Of a sudden he made complete surrender and a tremor of emotion shook him.

"Little sister," he said slowly, and laughed in sheer derision of the insufficient meaning. "Little sister." He nodded and picked up his bags. As earlier in the evening, he whispered her name as he moved slowly toward the door: "Oh, Bernice — Bernice!"

He had seated himself in the car and started back toward Gethelds before he spoke again. "The miracle," he repeated. "After all, woman herself is the one eternal, ever-recurring, uncomprehended, and incomprehensible miracle of life."

CHAPTER XV

TO THE MAN IN THE DESERT

Branics entered her home quickly after Darling had put her down. A gripping excitement held her so that her eyes flashed, and her delicate nostrils quivered over her rapid breath. Yet in contrast her lips were firm in the line of purpose.

Fired by the lure of the great adventure, she acted and spoke quickly.

Of her maid, who answered her ring, she inquired for her father, and learned that he had not yet returned from his official duties, late though it was. For a moment her face softened as she pictured him in the midst of his labors, then she turned and hurried directly to the apartment set apart for his office, library, and work-room.

Seating herself at his desk she drew a sheet of paper before her and wrote rapidly for a moment. She threw down the pencil and read over her message:

DADDY DEAR:

I am off on a hunt for the "Miracle." Harold goes with me. President Gilson knows all about it and approves. Don't worry about me.

With love,

Branics

At the last she lifted the sheet, pressed it to her lips, and laid it on her father's blotter. She rose and left

the room, going to her own. She called her maid and directed her to pack a traveling-case with her leathern coat, her cap, and her goggles, and the short, corduroy skirt she wore when flying, and also what else she might need for a trip of a week or ten days.

Herself she turned to the bath-room, disrobed, and bathed. With the maid's assistance, she dressed quickly, while she questioned her as to what she had packed.

A ring from below announced Darling's return. She slipped on the squirrel-skin coat again, picked up the case, and went down. A glance showed her his long, rakish roadster drawn up at the curb, and he met her as she turned into the parlor where he waited.

"You're a wonder," he said in awed tones. "There isn't one girl in a million who would dare this thing. I wonder if you realize just what you are doing?"

She nodded.

"I'm accepting one gentleman's escort to another," she retorted.

"That isn't how the world will regard it," Darling growled.

"Oh, hang the world!" snapped Bernice, and laughed in his face. "Come, we must hurry. We have to find the miracle yet."

"I have found *my* miracle," Darling said slowly. "It is you."

She shook her head. "Are you going to waste time in trying to make love?" she asked.

"No." He turned from her, paced the length of the apartment, and back. "No," he repeated shortly. "What need? You know that I love you. I don't need to tell you. And I know that you don't love me—as I want you to. Oh, I know you are fond of me in

your way, Bernice—but it isn't the love of a woman for a man, as mine is the love of a man for *the* woman.

"I told you to-night this trip was madness. It is, because I am mad for you. Can you imagine what these coming days and nights alone with you will mean to me? Sweet—oh, yes—too sweet—a sweet torture which makes me doubt my strength. Do you know what I was thinking as I waited for you just now?

"I was pretending for a moment that you were mine, and that this was our honeymoon, and that after a bit, when we were alone, I would reach out and draw you into my arms, and lift you to my breast, and put down my mouth to yours, and kiss you—kiss you till I was drunk on your lips—and feel that I had the right—that no one could question me in anything, because—you were mine—had given yourself to me."

Her eyes had widened darkly as he had spoken, and something akin to pity grew in their depths.

"Don't," she broke out, as he paused. "Please don't, Harold. It worries me to have you talk to me in this fashion. I don't want to make you suffer. Perhaps I was wrong to ask you to go with me on this trip. I suppose I didn't think of anything save the need of our country, and that I had known you so long, that I could trust you—be so utterly safe, if you were with me—"

Darling straightened as from a blow. "Thank you," he said strongly. "Forgive me, Bernice. I sha'n't speak in this manner again—ever. Only all I have said is true. I love you. I meant what I said about that, and when I said that I knew something which has not touched you as yet—the miracle of all life—which is love."

He turned away. For a time neither spoke. Darling stood fighting with his own emotions. Bernice stood with knit brows, in contemplation. She it was who broke the silence. "After all, big brother, I belong to you rightly. But for you I would not be here — to-night. I'd be back there somewhere in the ruins of a city. It is to you I owe my safety — my life. So — if you really want —"

"Stop!" said the man hoarsely. "Do you think I want *payment*? Bernice, do you — can you — think that? Oh, it's a gift I want — a gift, Bernice. No man buys either respect — or love."

He paused for a moment, then went on: "And don't think I don't want to go with you. I do — too much. That was just it. I was afraid — of myself. But I'd rather go than do anything else in this life." He threw back his shoulders and lifted his head. "Now that is past. You have given me back my balance. From now on I shall think of my country."

Quite slowly she came to him, lifted her hands and laid them on his shoulders. Her eyes looked into his, searched them. "I am sorry," she said quite simply.

"Oh, Harold, I am really sorry I can't feel as you wish. But you know how I do feel, dear, and after to-night I respect you as never before. And so"—she put up her lips—"take me in your arms and kiss me, big brother."

A gasping sigh swelled Darling's breast. Very gently he lifted his arms and drew them around her. Very slowly he put down his mouth to hers. And the pressure of his lips was controlled, though the arms which held her quivered.

"And now write Stillman a note and let him go," he urged as he released her.

She smiled softly. "Take my case out to the motor," she directed.

For another moment he hesitated. "You're going? You're going—with me—after this?" he stammered.

"Of course, I shall go," she responded. "A man who kisses the woman he wants like that is a man to be trusted. Forgive me for making the test, Harold. Now we must hurry. We have lost a lot of time."

Without a word Harold picked up her case and led her down to the roadster. Only in his driving did he show his emotion, as he sent the car at wild speed along the streets now well-nigh deserted. Bernice laid a hand on his arm.

"Are you angry, big brother?" she asked.

"Angry? Good God!" choked Darling.

The lights of the station loomed, swept closer. He threw out his clutch and slid to a stop at the entrance, sprang down, and put up a hand for hers.

Arkel, whom he had 'phoned, came hurrying forward, took their bags, and led them into the station and through it to the tracks.

A long, racing compound stood coupled to a baggage-car and a handsome coach. Several men were busily loading the sections of an aëroplane into the front car as Harold and Bernice came down and passed the barriers.

A negro porter stood at the steps of the rear car and quickly took their grips from Arkel. Excusing himself, Harold walked forward and spoke to the engineer, who leaned from the locomotive's window. "Push her, old chap," he said, smiling. "What's your orders?"

The driver grinned. "A white target, and the last notch," he made answer. "My name's Hogan."

Darling's smile widened. "Not *the Hogan?*" he questioned.

He had recognized the name of a man noted for his record-breaking driving — a man who had grown gray in the service of the system. Out of his mind, full of odds and ends of information, such as the secret agent must gather, he dragged up a momentary recollection of some of this man's past.

He put out his hand. Hogan wiped his palm on his jumper, and took that of Darling.

"I'll sleep better," said the government agent. Hogan grinned.

The man handed the last section of the air-ship into the baggage-car. The door was clanged shut. Darling went back to Arkel. Bernice had gone aboard. He spoke to his mechanic.

"Take the roadster back, Jim, and — one moment." He tore off a leaf from a note-book and wrote quickly. "Take this, and see that the President himself gets it. Tell 'em you come from me. Now — good-by."

He swung to the step of the coach and waved a hand forward. As he reached the platform of the coach the steam sighed softly — the station began to slip away to the rear. A cooler breath of air came as they slid from beneath the train shed and emerged into the red and green starred yards.

With Hogan at the throttle, they were off.

He went into the car. Bernice, already unwrapped, was lying back in one of the chairs. She smiled as he came toward her, and lifted a hand. He took it quite simply and lifted it to his lips, dropped it, and threw himself into a chair.

"And so begins the chase," said Bernice. .

Stations, hamlets, and cities rose before them, came

up out of the distance, flashed by with a blurring outline and a rattle and clank of switch points, cleared in the half perspective, and sank back of the horizon.

A trail of smoke, a rush and a roar, and a clanking of flanges marked their course. Here and there a figure appeared, waved a hand at their flying passage, and gazed after. They had crossed the Mississippi during the night, and by the time they faced each other across a little table at breakfast they were speeding far across the long reaches of Iowa, westward.

"It's a great country, little Biddy girl — a great country — still," Darling remarked. "All night we've run across it, and will run all day, and another night, and part of another day, and still we will not have found the end of what we hold — yet. They can't take it. They haven't the means or the men. We can wear them out, if nothing else should offer. It is a great country, and I love it — and so do you."

So they spoke of the nation's welfare rather than of each other as the brown miles fell away. But her hand nestled in his, and she did not take it away, and after a time a strange sort of peace seemed to descend upon his spirit, with something almost like content. Later he took her forward and let her ride on the engine itself, to her unbounded interest and Hogan's grinning admiration.

For an hour Bernice asked him questions about the great machine, which delighted his heart. At the end — "How far do you take us?" she inquired.

"To Omyha," he told her; "an' I wisht 'twas all th' ways."

At the next stop she climbed down and went back to the coach, leaving a fresh conquest behind her.

The westward flight went on. Omaha came and fell

behind. The Nebraska prairies enwrapped them in a far-flung landscape, which gave place to the stretches of eastern Colorado, where they swept for miles along the North Platte River, west and south.

At Denver they were switched from the Union Pacific to the Rio Grande tracks, and took up the journey south, past Colorado Springs to Pueblo, turned west and stormed the mountains where the cañon of the Arkansas brought cries of admiration from Bernice.

On to the west and north they mounted, with the exhaust of the engine a harsh rattle flung back from the echoing crags, past which they ascended to Leadville, and then down, down, down to Grand Junction on the Gunnison River, and still westward, until at last they passed the Colorado-Utah border and slid into the great curve of the right-of-way, which led them down to White House.

It squats on a tableland, north and east of the mountains, a village on the right-of-way. Its life is simple and unused to any excitement. But it woke to a sudden interest as the special ran into a siding and came to a throbbing halt.

That interest deepened at sight of Darling and the beautiful girl, who seemed to be his companion. It reached fever heat when he opened the box car, explained his mission in part, and asked for volunteers to help him unload and assemble the aëroplane.

It climaxed in an offer of most of the available male population around the station when they learned that he was a government agent on a secret mission. Fifteen minutes saw the Curtiss unloaded in sections and stretched out on a level space near the depot, with Harold supervising and directing. An hour saw the assembling well started.

That night a volunteer guard of the local inhabitants watched it from darkness to dawn lest some curious mind might be inspired to examine it too closely and do it damage. They built a great bonfire and patrolled the shadowy outlines of the strange machine they had never known before save in pictures.

Darling and Bernice retired to their berths early.

Both felt a strange, nervous excitement, which made their conversation one of broken phrases and half-spoken thoughts. Morning found Harold out at the plane, clad in his leathern jacket against the sting in the air, working with his volunteer helpers in getting the last braces and stays wired taut and true.

Before Bernice came out to call him to his breakfast he had filled the tanks and the bark of the motor cracked on the ears of the gaping men who had helped him build up the great aërial machine.

Over the meal he outlined his plans. "I want to make a trial flight first," he told her. "I'm not used to the air up here, and I've been told that the currents over these hills are very uncertain. As soon as I've eaten I'll go up and try things out. Then if I find I can make it I'll come back for you."

"You'll be careful," she said quickly, a touch of real worry in her tones. "You'll be careful, Harold. If anything happened I'd never forgive myself. I led you into this."

"And I'd never forgive myself if anything happened to you," he answered. "That's another reason for this trial. Remember the passenger I'll carry when I go up the next time. I don't want to have my little sister bump her nose against the Rockies. It's a pretty little nose." He laughed, pushed back his plate and jumped up, pulled on his cap, and picked up his

goggles from where he had laid them on an end of the table.

Bernice followed him outside, and they walked down to where the plane rested among its self-constituted guards. Some one had fastened a tiny American flag to one of the braces, and it fluttered in the morning breeze.

Harold climbed to his seat and instructed the men how to hold the machine, but it was Bernice's own hands at her insistence which rocked up the compression and sent the propeller spinning. Quite slowly at first the Curtiss trundled forward, gained headway and rose.

A faint cheer broke from the men, and one or two waved their hats as the plane shot up against the sky of morning. Two hundred feet up Darling circled and came directly over their heads, his motor snapping in a staccato roar. He began to ascend higher and swung off on a long leg toward the mountains.

Bernice watched with her heart painfully manifesting its presence. She knew better than the gaping men what this trial meant — its dangers and uncertainties. When the plane suddenly dived without warning she gasped, and her hand went to her breast.

The next moment, however, Darling had recovered his control and was rising again. He neared the range of mountains, and she saw the Curtiss rock. Again it seemed to her that she was stifling with the suspense and apprehension. As clearly as though with him she knew that treacherous currents, bent and twisted by the hills, were playing with the plane.

She stood staring until Harold swung around and came back in a long, swooping glide, which brought him to earth, very near his starting point.

"Can do," he remarked in pidgin as he climbed down

among the clustering men. But Bernice felt that he spoke to her alone. He began to work over his carbureter adjustment. "Need a bit more gas in this temperature and height," he explained as he screwed his adjustments fast. "Did you see me hit that chimney? The up-draft over those hills is like shooting a rapid the wrong way to, but I think we can make it all right."

She turned away to the car to dress for the flight. Harold left the Curtiss and followed. He came into the car just as Bernice was belting the corduroy skirt about her waist. He approached her quickly and, reaching down, took her hands in his.

His eyes peered like those of some giant bird through his mica goggles. "Give me a note to Stillman, and let me bring him back here," he requested. "You stay here, little girl. The air's rotten — full of holes as a sieve. Shake the bird-clothes, Biddy, and wait for me. If I'm not back in three days you'll know something's happened."

"Stay here?" she questioned. "The uncertainty would drive me crazy. If you go, I go with you."

"But I can't take you into this fresh danger," he protested. "Your presence will unnerve me. I —"

"Harold," she said sharply, "you promised to quit thinking of me and think only of the country. This is my trip, planned and begun by me. The risk is of my seeking. Here"—she picked up her coat, handed it to him, and turned her back—"help me into this."

"Nerve," grumbled Darling in grudging admiration as he held the garment. "We'll win over if we have to fly upside down. Oh, Biddy, you break my heart!"

"I'm more likely to break your neck with my venture," she smiled as she drew on her cap and gauntlets and snapped her goggles into position. He turned and

preceded her from the car and lifted her gently to the ground.

Awed interest sat on the faces of the citizens of White House as the slender woman mounted the spidery frame-work and took her station in the passengers' seat. They stood and shuffled and stared until Darling spoke twice before several came forward to steady the plane for the start.

Suddenly he seized the propeller. His voice barked as sharply as the chatter of the engine. "Now hold her — hold her!" He sent the propeller around.

The staccato buzz of the engine responded. Darling ran around, climbed to his seat, and cried out to let go. The Curtiss rose swiftly and began to climb in spirals. Up and up, round and round and round it spun, growing smaller and smaller as it rose and rose like a giant buzzard on widespread wings.

To the men standing with back-thrown heads and half-open mouths it came to seem but a speck spinning slowly round and round in the blue. Suddenly it stopped spinning and swept off toward the mountains in a long, easy slant.

Upon it Darling spoke to Bernice for the first time since starting: "This ought to be enough elevation. I came so high, in hopes that I can clear the mountains above the worst of the currents over their tops. There's a chop of cross-currents down there like the swirl of a surf. We'll get part of it, I suppose. Sit tight."

The plane swept forward, neared the mountains, flashed above them. In an instant it tilted far over, righted, swung back in an opposite direction, straightened up, and dipped forward, steadied and shot ahead.

Clinging to her seat, Bernice watched the shoulders of the man before her, the play of his muscles as he

moved a lever, shifted to meet this angle or that of the erratic upflung currents through which they were driving. Below her, as she glanced down, she saw the bare tops of the mountains, windwhipped, rugged, gashed and seamed by the elements of ages — the wrinkles in their lonely faces filled with a powder of snow.

The wind which rose above them was bitterly cold, so that she shivered. Above the whistle of the wind came the rattle of the engine. She saw Harold tilt his elevating planes and knew that he was trying to rise higher, but the plane did not ascend. Yet the rocks and crags beneath her fell away, and she realized with a swelling heart that the first barrier was crossed.

The next instant she choked and gasped without volition, as the Curtiss dipped and plunged downward in a sickening rush.

She saw Harold working with frantic haste at his levers. She glanced down and saw the rocks rushing upward to meet her. And she closed her eyes. A moment and a swift checking of the fabric she rode brought them open just as Darling turned his head.

His face was white, drawn, tight-lipped. "Close," he said.

She nodded and he turned away. They were sweeping over a lower tumble of gashed and gullied landscape, straight into the south. The biplane steadied and darted forward. Darling breathed a sigh of relief.

"Near thing that, little girl," he called back to her. "If I could have gone higher, but she couldn't make it. Well, we pulled through. See there!"

He pointed far ahead where a break in the mountains showed a shining silver ribbon. "Grand River," he said in explanation. "It ought to be, if it hasn't moved

of late. If it is, there's a town down there before long. We can take the river as a guide and follow it to its junction with the Green. They form the Colorado, you know."

"Goodness! Is this a geography quiz," giggled Bernice, carried away by the reaction from the recent peril. "If it is, I don't know nuthin', teacher, please. I suppose this thing we're flying over is a relief map. It looks like one."

"It would be quite a relief to know just when we'd get back on the map," chuckled Darling. "How do you feel, anyway, Biddy?"

"All right now," she assured him. "But for a minute I felt like I do in an elevator, 'going down'!"

"A minute," laughed Harold. "Honey, it was just about five seconds. Aha — there's the town!"

Far below them a cluster of houses set among trees swept into vision, and to the west the crooked line of the river flowing between the hills. Darling nodded with satisfaction. "Moab," he informed and swung the Curtiss southwest along the river's course.

They fled onward. The mountains became more rugged, more awesome, more gashed and torn. The gorge of the river deepened. They came to the junction of another stream from the north, and Darling declared that the stream they now followed was the Colorado.

Far below them it boiled and lashed against the cliffs which held it in restless bondage. Vast rapids showed as ripples from the biplane, which reached across the bends and turns, but ever held to its main direction, west and south. Again and again the woman cried out at the wonders of that well-nigh deserted region beneath them.

Three hours had passed since they rose in that first charge at the mountains beyond White House. Darling let the plane sink lower and began scanning the country with a more watchful eye. Twenty minutes later they sighted a town on the west bank of the river, swung in a great spiral above it, and sank slowly to earth, in an open space, near a corral.

A bearded figure, like that of a viking, came slowly toward them. As Harold helped Bernice to the ground the man eyed them in a stolid wonder—the biplane, their caps and coats and goggles.

Not till he was close enough to descry their eyes through the mica lenses did he speak: "Ay skall say you ban vun of dem air mens—hey?"

"Yes," said Darling. "Might this town be Hite?"

"Ay ban tank it might," returned the blond-bearded stranger.

"Well, is it?" Darling eyed the other as though inclined to believe him indulging in facetiousness.

"Oy, ay," said the man.

"And who are you? Do you live here?"

"Yaas, Ay lif here. Ay ban Larsen." He began to scratch his hatless head while he still eyed the Curtiss with his puckered blue eyes.

"Perhaps you know a man about here named Stillman?" Harold inquired.

"Pairhaps Ay do," parroted the man.

Darling grinned at Bernice. "Well, do you?" he pressed.

"Oy, ay, Ay ban know heem," returned the man, advancing and laying a tentative hand on a brace of the plane with curious interest. "He ban keep horses in mine corral."

"Can you tell me where he lives?" Darling suggested.

Larsen shook his head. "Ay do nodt know," he said slowly. "Ofer de rifer he comes an' ofer de rifer he goes. One tam in seex mont comes he by mine corral. Den goes he avay agan ofer de rifer."

Darling nodded and looked at his watch. It was past three. "Can you let us have something to eat and drink? Aren't you hungry, Biddy?" he questioned.

Bernice nodded, and Larsen suddenly smiled at this evidence of earthliness in beings who arrived in so unusual a fashion. "Ay vill tell mine woman," he advised and turned away in the direction of his house.

A crowd had begun to gather about the Curtiss by now, edging forward in curious shyness. Darling turned and told them briefly that it was an air-ship, and that after a bite to eat he was going to fly. Having thus guarded against any possible danger to the bi-plane he led Bernice to the house into which Larsen had disappeared.

When they came out the crowd had thickened, but no one had ventured to meddle with the strange craft. Darling helped Bernice aboard, gained what assistance he needed from the onlookers present, and started the motor. Again they took to the air and headed this time east and south.

They flashed over the flood of the river. Far as the eye could reach stretched a vast tumbled plateau, worn and gashed and torn, a barren and burned-out thing, where turret and pinnacle of sandstone stood foreshortened as the aëroplane swept over.

Turning she looked back to the west and north. There against the westerly sun she saw the mighty masses of two lofty peaks. Her heart leaped.

Surely she thought these must be the mountains Meade had mentioned. They had rested for an hour and it was the time of early twilights. Now between four and five the sun already hung far down the west.

Beneath them the shadows of pinnacle and buttress stretched far flung over the barren plateau. The giant plane whirled above them. It came to Bernice, that so in the dim past of the youth of the world, a prehistoric monster might have flown above the reaches of a desert with none to mark its flight.

She turned back and strained her eyes forward for a glance of the oasis where she expected to find the miracle she had sought. But she saw nothing save the barren wall and buttress, the pinnacle and crag, the chasm and gorge.

And the daylight lessened slowly as they flew eastward and south.

It was almost twilight when she spoke suddenly to Harold. Far to the front she had caught sight of a cuplike depression faintly green in the last of the daylight, its vegetation still uninjured by the frosts in its protected situation. "There— ahead and to the left!" she directed. "Meade said it was like a great emerald held in a brown and wrinkled palm. Do you see it, Harold?"

Darling nodded.

"We'll chance it at any rate," he made answer. "It's getting pretty dusky, and I fancy we've come about the right distance." He increased the speed slightly, and they rushed down toward the cup in the hills.

The sun had sunk, and only the twilight aided their choice of a landing as they swung out over the little valley. Once more Bernice called out and pointed.

"There — where that dark spot is!" she cried with excitement. "There must be a house there — I saw a light!"

"So did I," agreed Darling. "I hope I don't run into the thing. This light is rotten. Hold tight, Biddy; I'm going it blind and I may make a bad landing."

He slowed the motor and let the plane glide into the deeper shadows of the valley. The last of the daylight vanished as they sank behind the rim of the plateau and swept in silence toward the light which winked from below.

With a shock which nearly shook the woman from her seat they landed close beside a little group of trees.

"Good Lord!" gasped Harold, "I hope I haven't busted anything." He lifted his voice and called: "Hello, inside there! Hello, I say!"

As Darling paused he wondered if this was really the home of Meade Stillman, and if the young inventor would bury his rancor and come to the defense of his country. If Bernice succeeded in her mission the nation would undoubtedly repel the invaders with a taste of their own medicine.

If not — Darling shuddered to think of the alternative!

CHAPTER XVI

MEADE'S CONFESSION

An oblong of light showed the opening of a door in the mass of the house set under the trees. The figure of a man appeared, peering into the darkness.

"Who called?" challenged a voice.

"I did," replied Darling. "Lend us a light or a lantern, will you? We've tumbled into your yard." He chuckled.

"Wait a moment," said the man and vanished. Yet in the few seconds he had stood there, with a beam of the lighted interior striking his face, Bernice had recognized Stillman.

Her heart began beating quickly, with the certain knowledge that they had reached the place they sought. "Did you recognize him? It was Meade," she whispered to Darling.

Harold nodded. "Right you are, Biddy. This is your number. Suppose we alight." He climbed from his seat and assisted her to the ground.

The figure of Stillman reappeared, swinging a lantern, and came directly toward them. Bernice waited until he was almost upon them and spoke: "Good evening, Mr. Stillman."

She heard the catch of his breath.

The next instant he had raised the lantern and held it to light her face. She had slipped off her goggles since landing, and the yellow glow brought her features out in striking distinctness against the background of

the night. "Miss Gethelds!" gasped Meade, and paused, overcome by sheer surprise.

"And Mr. Darling, whom you will remember," said Bernice, extending a gauntleted hand. "Aren't you going to say you're glad to see us? I'm not used to having my gentlemen friends stand aghast at my presence."

"But how—what brought you—here?" stammered Stillman, letting the lantern sink and taking the proffered hand.

Darling chuckled again.

"The aëroplane brought her, old chap," he remarked, coming to the astonished Meade's assistance. "It pretty well near succeeded in breaking her neck, too. I came down like the side of a house. I'm a bit awkward in my handling in these altitudes."

"You might have killed her, trying to land here in the dark," said Meade in quick reproach.

"Not my fault I didn't," admitted Darling. "Always was a fool for luck, though. It still holds. You see, we were in a hurry and I didn't think it would be light for some hours, and I was tired of flying. Besides, we were hunting you."

"Hunting me?" Stillman's surprise began to mount once more.

"Correct. Quit chinning and take Miss Gethelds inside. We've had a bit of a flight to-day as it happens. Leave me the lantern, like a good chap. I want to look around and see what your piece of earth did to my machine. We've got to get out to-morrow."

"To-morrow?" Meade was becoming monosyllabic.

"Right. Give me the lantern." He took it from Stillman's hand. "Take him inside, Biddy," he admonished.

Bernice laughed softly and laid her hand on Meade's arm. "Please take me in and let me sit down," she requested. "We really have flown all day to find you, and we are in a great hurry."

"Your pardon," said Stillman. "I was overcome—with surprise."

He turned and led her toward the house, whose door remained open. Walking beside him, she felt the sinewy strength of his arm which supported her hand. And this was Meade Stillman's home, she thought, as she neared the open door. Some way she found herself breathing more quickly. It was in this place the miracle had been given birth.

Meade stood aside for her to enter the lighted room.

She passed and found herself within an immense apartment, its floors covered with brilliant Navajo blankets, its walls faced with jointed lumber and trimmed with game-heads and other blankets. Beside a large, strongly constructed table a man had risen and was facing her entrance. Instinctively she knew him for Meade's father, and advanced with a smile.

"I am sure you are Professor Stillman," she said, before Meade could voice an introduction. "Mr. Stillman told me so much of you when he was in Washington."

Howard Stillman smiled and clasped her hand. "And you are Miss Bernice Gethelds, daughter of my old friend," he responded. "I heard Meade cry out your name. I am happy to welcome you to my poor house. I have sent my servants to prepare a room for your immediate use. Let me offer you a chair. You have a bag or other luggage?"

"A tooth-brush and a tube of paste in my pocket,"

laughed Bernice. "We came merely to call. Oh!" The last was an involuntary exclamation quickly checked, as a Navajo squaw appeared at a door behind Stillman and addressed him in guttural accents.

Stillman smiled. "Your room is ready, Miss Bernice," he told her. "Spring Water, here, will show you to it till you freshen up a bit."

Bernice smiled at the brown and wrinkled face of the waiting woman and followed her as she led her to a room opening off the main living apartment she had first entered.

Spring Water waved a comprehensive hand about the chamber.

"Water, soap, towel," she grunted, indicating the articles she mentioned on a small rustic sort of stand. "Wash um, brush um hair, feel better. *Bueno.*" She turned and waddled, rather than walked, from the room, with the flat-footed glide of moccasined feet.

Bernice slipped out of her close-fitting cap and shook her head to free the close-pressed hair on her scalp. She glanced about the room, and a smile flickered on her lips. This was Meade's room. Her color mounted. She lifted her hands and loosened her hair, brushing it quickly, laved her face and hands in the water from the pitcher, and arranged the ruddy masses upon her head.

Feeling decidedly refreshed, she turned back to the other room.

Meade alone stood by the door, leaning against its frame, looking out. He turned at the sound of her entrance and smiled. "Father is out with Darling at your machine," he told her. "Darling says he strained something in landing. I hope you'll overlook my first surprise at your coming. I was completely floored for

a minute or two, and you know what a babe in arms I am at knowing how to act."

"Don't you think you overestimate your own failings?" asked the girl as she crossed to his side. "The only time I ever saw you handle a gripping situation, you know you impressed me as knowing just *about* how to act."

Meade flushed.

"You mean that night I defied Gotz?" he said quickly. "After all, that was just primitive man speaking — it came natural to resent his remarks about some one I loved and respected."

"It is the natural things which *are* genuine," said Bernice.

Meade nodded. "Yet you have to polish a diamond to make it shine," he smiled. "I think I was a bit frightened as well as surprised to-night when you spoke to me. You see, you ran an awful risk in landing by chance, like that."

"It was justified by the need," she rejoined.

He started and lifted his eyes squarely to hers. "There is some need — something I can do? You come to find me for that? You believe what I wrote you?"

"Yes — I need you very much. You mustn't fail me." Her eyes did not shift from his regard.

Suddenly he laughed softly — in a manner as though a burden had been lifted rather than placed upon him. He came a pace closer and leaned toward her.

"Tell me," he urged quickly. "What is it? Are you in trouble — can I help you?" Eagerness rang in his tones and woke an echo of gladness in her breast. Here, she told herself, was yet another man who stood ready to throw himself into the breach without asking for selfish reward or selfish consideration; a man who

would act in a natural way, fight in a natural way, love — she caught herself with a little inward shock and shook herself back to reply to his question:

"I wonder if Darling and your father can't come in? I must talk to both your father and yourself, and time presses. Won't you call them in?"

He shot her a puzzled glance, but asked no reason for her request. Swinging to the door, he disappeared into the night. Soon steps sounded outside, and the three men entered.

Still standing, she waited until they were inside and seated herself at the table, maintaining silence until they had found other seats for themselves. She was marshaling her words, her arguments, before speaking. "I came because of the war," she said at last.

"War! What war?" cried Meade, half starting from his chair. The eyes of his father widened and narrowed as quickly, though he did not speak. Harold nodded as he recognized the advantage of her opening.

She had chosen a word to thrill and fire the breast of the male.

She answered in hurried description. While they sat leaning to her, drinking in her words with shocked and startled ears, she told them of what had occurred within the last few months, drew them the picture of the nation driven against the wall of last resistance, described, as one who had seen it, the fall and destruction of New York.

"And that is what brings me to you," she made an ending. "I knew of this airship of yours and what it was said it could do. I knew that you had promised me in your letter that if ever the country needed your help it should have it, and that you said all I had to do was to ask for your assistance at any time."

"And so I came to ask you to help your country; to come back with this invention of yours and save her from her danger. And I came because—I knew that if I asked it, you would know that the need was great, and because I felt that I knew you well enough to know what your answer would be. Meade Stillman, I bring you the call of your country!"

She paused, breathing quickly, and sat leaning toward him, her breast pressed against the table, her hands flung out, gripping the edge—waiting the effect of her words.

Meade Stillman rose slowly from his chair. A deep drawn breath swelled his chest and held it so for a moment. He turned in silence from the lure of the beautiful woman before him and let his eyes fall on the figure of the elder man, and found his eyes fixed on him. "Father?" he said.

"The call is to you, my boy," said Howard Stillman.

Meade's head came up with a jerk. He swung back to the girl at the table. "Then I shall answer it!" he cried. "Miss Gethelds, I am coming back. I know what the Stillman ship will do. That night when I left your home and started back here I stopped and looked out over the city. There was a great white shaft pointing up to the sky, and it was all silver in the moonlight.

"I stood and I looked a long time at it, and some way it seemed even then that some time—somehow—I, too, should have a chance to show that I loved my country. And so—and so—"

He paused and fought with an overwhelming emotion. Then, while they watched in silence, he turned and walked into the night, in search of a lost self-control.

"God help the Japs when they meet that spirit," said Darling in the surcharged moment which followed.

"War," said Prof. Stillman. "War, and we never knew it. That's what it means to be buried alive, young people. We haven't been out of the desert since June. We have heard nothing. We neither knew nor dreamed. I marvel that you found us."

"Men tried and failed— a woman succeeded," said Darling.

Stillman nodded.

"A woman," he repeated. "They are really the ones who inspire all action, Darling. The Stillman machine may accomplish the result in a material way, but after all it will still be the woman who will save the nation. They are the ones who dare all, as this little girl has dared all, in a cause."

"It is they who know how to forget the self; they who know how to give and not falter. I have sometimes thought it is they who preserve our faith in ourselves. My dear, you are a rare vision in this place. It is long since I have seen a woman of my own kind, save in dreams. How is your father? He was one of my old-time friends."

"Well, but awfully busy," said Bernice.

The professor began a series of questions, which she answered. He seemed to feel a thirst for first-hand news of the world in which he had once held a part. Darling helped out in drawing him a picture of the present situation.

An hour passed, and he frowned. "I wonder where that boy is keeping himself?" he broke out. "I never saw him affected like this. After all he is not a man, save in years and education. I have not done by him

as I ought, I suppose, in keeping him by me. I think perhaps I had better see if I can find him."

Bernice rose. A sudden impulse had seized her. "Let me," she suggested. "I believe I understand his feelings. It was the suddenness overcame him." She moved toward the door. "I'll bring him back," she promised, and passed out.

Outside she paused and closed her eyes to rid them of the blurring transition from the lighted room. She felt a tremor shake her. Now that she had followed the impulse which had caused her action, she found herself surprised that there should have been an impulse.

Yet she had studied the face of the man who had gone this way the hour before, and she had seen the chrysalis of youth and inexperience burst before her eyes, and the soul of the man to be look forth. For one instant, even then, an urge to follow him into the night had surged within her. It was the maternal instinct to still the suffering pangs of labor, either of body or soul — the age-old instinct of the mother which lurks in every female breast.

She stood for a moment, shaken by the inexplicable quiver which set her knees to shaking.

Then she passed forward, and from under the trees about the house. A faint, new crescent moon had come up and hung above the rim of the oasis, its sickle blade giving a faint, glistening light, which made her able to see where she went with care. November though it was, the oasis lay scarcely touched by the finger of winter, and the night air was comparatively soft.

In her leatheren jacket, she felt no sense of cold as she moved on past the aëroplane and went down a slop-

ing surface from the house. She was recalling lines of the letter Meade had mailed to her from Hite:

To the west of the house lie the pastures, green with lush growing lucerne, and sometimes, when the longing and the loneliness crowd too close upon me, I rise and go down and stand in the midst of the sleeping vegetation, and stretch out my arms to the east. And I lift up my face to the moon, if there be one, and try to picture it shining on a wonderful crown of wonderful hair, and lighting a woman's face.

He had spoken freely in that letter, as a natural man, untrammeled by more modern conventions, might speak; pouring out upon the paper the youth, the longing, the hope and ambitions, and the inexperience of his manhood, so that the woman, younger in years, but older in knowledge, could look far into his soul. And because she remembered those lines, she went toward the west from the house, toward the fields and the crescent moon.

The grasses of the oasis swept her feet and ankles as she passed and went down the little incline.

Somewhere she heard the purl of running water and the twitter of a night bird, and she came to a fence of wire. She stooped and crawled between its strands, rose, and stared before her over the tops of the late crop lucerne which filled the field. So far as she could see, she was alone in the night. She lifted her voice.

"Meade — Meade Stillman!" she called softly and paused to listen.

A figure rose from among the alfalfa and stood at a distance before her.

"Meade," she repeated and started forward, uncon-

scious that she had addressed him by his given name. Again the quiver of unnamed feeling shook her body.

"Miss Gethelds — Bernice," said Stillman and came to meet her. "What is it? Why do you come to me here? Why not father or Darling?"

"I came because I wanted to, and because we wondered what kept you. I thought — Oh, I thought I understood better how you felt. And I remembered what you wrote in the letter — that you came here to think —"

"About you," said the man. "Well — it was true. I was thinking about you again, just now, before you came. Do you see the moon?"

She nodded.

"It is the new moon — the moon of new things — of new endeavors," he continued. "Oh, it is fate! To-day I was the same man I have always been, with no further outlook than the rim rock of this valley. To-night comes — with the new moon — and you.

"Bernice — don't take offense, for I mean none, and you *are* Bernice to me — I know nothing of the art of making love, but the last year has taught me much of love itself; for I have been a lover ever since that night I told you I would come if you ever asked it, and ran away, because I did not dare to say good-by, for fear I might say something else. How I should tell you of this, I do not know.

"I believe there are rules to be observed, but I do not know them. All I know is that I love you; that I want to give you my life; that I want to guard you and shield you and protect you; that I want to work for you, win for you, and bring what I win and lay it at your feet, as the cave man brought home his kill to the cave.

"It is not the love of the cities perhaps, but it is the right love—the natural love—the love of the birds and the beasts—the kind which makes the world what it is—for which we were both created. As the world looks at the thing—as perhaps I shall look at it to-morrow—I should not tell you this till I have cleared my name.

"But at least I know that I am the innocent son of an innocent man, no matter what the world may say. And I know that you trust me. And because you have come to me here in the fields, I know that—you love me. Bernice—sweetheart woman—come to me."

He opened his arms to her.

Again the tremor shook her as she stood before him. As he ceased speaking, she lifted her eyes. Her lips parted. Like one moving in a dream, she swayed toward him, reached him, touched him, felt his arms close about her, leaned against him, buried her face on his breast, and ceased to tremble as the strength of his body struck through to her own.

A sudden, swift sense of peace and satisfaction filled her, and was followed by the recollection of the arms of another man which had held her and quivered as she herself had shaken but a moment before.

A great wave of pity surged in her breast, but could not drown the comfort of Meade's arms. She lifted her face and found his bent above it. Her own arms crept about him. "Meade," she whispered. "Oh, Meade, my boy—my own boy." She strained him to her and lifted her lips to his.

He laughed softly, gladly, as he lifted his mouth from hers. "The beginning of all things," he said quickly. "The new moon, our love—the beginning of the end of this invasion of our country. Bernice, when I have

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s and swung wide the portal
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something like a gasp he shut the

hispered Bernice. She struggled to
essing on Meade's breast with her palms.
Meade. Oh, I must go in! Some way

I must make him understand. You see, he never suspected that I loved you. I didn't myself, until you opened your arms back there and bade me come into them.

"Not until then did I know, really — not till I heard the call. And then I knew — as every woman knows, when the real time comes, dear, and she listens and answers the call of the one man. Good night, dear. Go get everything ready." She turned to the door.

Meade pushed it open and held it for her to enter. He thrust a head in and glanced about the room. "Father?" he questioned in an attempt at naturalness.

Darling, who was seated in a chair, lighting a cigarette, glanced up. "He went to the laboratory, I fancy," he offered and rose.

"Thanks," said Meade and shut the door.

Bernice crossed to the table, turned and leaned against it, gripping its edge with her hands. Her pulses were pounding, and a sense almost of guilt oppressed her in her new found happiness as she let her eyes rest on Darling's figure. Yet she raised them resolutely to his. "You saw?" she questioned.

He nodded. "Yes, I saw. Well?"

"You saw Meade Stillman — kiss me?" She paused again.

"Yes; and I think I saw *you* kiss Meade Stillman. Do you love him, Biddy? Was that why you wanted to come for him yourself?"

"No!" she cried out in passionate denial. "I didn't know I loved him, Harold. I didn't. When I started on this trip I never thought of love, or knew if I would ever feel it. Like most girls, I suppose I expected it to come to me some time, but not here. It wasn't until

after I left here to find him to-night, and found him down below here, and he spoke to me and opened his arms, that I knew. But I do love him, Harold. I do love him.

"I want him for mine; I want to be his. I know now what you meant when you said I had not been touched, but it has come upon me now. I've stopped being just a girl to-night and begun being a woman, and I love — as a woman loves — now." She released her hold on the table and spread her hands before her like a child beseeching favor. "Oh, Harold, dear Big Brother — don't be angry or hurt with me! Please. Don't look at me like that."

Darling crossed and tossed his cigarette into the maw of a fireplace at one end of the room, turned, and came back upon her in swift strides.

"Look at you," he said almost fiercely. "Good God! How can I help it? I'd rather look at you than at anything else in the world. You're worth it, little sister. You're beautiful, too, little sister — more beautiful to-night, when I know that I've lost you, than ever before, because, as you say, you have become a woman, and your face wears the look of the eternal woman, the Madonna look, which comes with wakened love."

He reached down and prisoned the appealing hands, forced them together and covered them with his own, raised them and pressed them to his breast, up under his bent throat. "Be angry with you, Little Sister?" he went on more calmly. "Be angry with you because your heart has opened to the sunlight of life? Why, dear God, would you think my love of that sort which could feel anger at any reason for your happiness? Oh,

Bernice—Bernice, that isn't my sort of love! Your happiness is what my love asks for—just your happiness, dear.

"Look back into the old days, little woman, and ask your heart if I did not always seek the thing which pleased you. Isn't it so? My love wanted to give you pleasure—see you happy—to make you smile and sing and laugh. Angry? No, no, Little Sister mine."

"But I didn't know I loved him," choked Bernice with downcast head. A sob burst from her lips. "If it wasn't for one thing, I'd hate myself for not having learned to love you," she murmured.

"And that thing is Meade Stillman," said Darling. "He's a good bred'un, Biddy. Get him outside, and he'll he a mighty big man."

"Generous to the last," she whispered. She freed her hands, raised one, and gently stroked his cheek. "Oh, Brother—Big Brother, it's breaking my heart to hurt you!" Turning, she fled to her room, her shoulders shaking with the weeping she repressed.

Darling looked after her as she went. Long after the door had been shut he stood there. At length he lifted his head, his shoulders went back. For the last time he choked down an instinctive rebellion. His lips parted, and he whispered softly: "Oh, Bernice—Bernice!" With a sigh of resignation he threw himself into a chair.

Alone in her room, already lighted by a lamp turned low on a little table, Bernice undressed with shaking fingers and laid herself on the bed.

CHAPTER XVII

THE MIRACLE SPREADS ITS WINGS

A GLORIOUS sun was slipping through her window when a knock fell on the door of Meade's room and a voice called: "Daughter."

Bernice opened sleepy eyes and stirred. For a moment it seemed to her rousing senses that she was back home and her father's voice was calling. A guilty sense of having over-slept assailed her. "Yes," she called in answer. "In a moment, Dad."

She threw back the covers and woke fully to her surroundings. A warm glow filled her heart and spread through her body as she dressed. She knew now that it was Howard Stillman who had called her "daughter."

She dressed to her coat and cap, threw the former over her arm, and went into the other room. Meade, Stillman, and Darling were awaiting her arrival to sit down to a breakfast which Spring Water and Fawn were placing on the table.

"Good morning. What time is it? Have you been up long?" she greeted the three who waited her coming.

"Hours," said Darling. "We're all ready to start. Meade's got a truck out there he says can fly, and we've loaded the stuff he's taking upon it. As soon as we've fed you, my lady, we'll start."

She felt Meade's eyes upon her, and a warm flood swept her cheeks. To cover that instinctive confusion she gave the signal to begin breakfast.

They spoke little and ate in haste. As soon as the meal was finished she donned her cap and coat, and they went outside. As Darling had said, Meade's home-built flier squatted beside the Curtiss, a box and a suitcase strapped to its lower vanes. "Meade says he knows a shorter route to the White House," explained Harold. "He's going to pilot."

Professor Stillman came with them, and the squaw and her daughter watched with stolid interest as Meade mounted his seat. Darling gave him a send-off, and he rose easily from the little slope before the door.

Harold helped Bernice aboard the Curtiss, and Stillman himself spun his engine. Close on Meade's heels, they shot down the slope, tilted, and rose with a circling swing to follow him into the north. Below them Meade's father waved a hand. Bernice answered the farewell gesture.

Three hours saw them over the last ridge of the mountains, coasting easily down on White House.

Leaving the planes, they started the back trip at once. Throughout it, Meade and Harold devoted most of their time to blue-prints. Darling explained that he had requested Gilson to arrange for immediate work on their return in the note he had sent from the depot by Arkel.

He predicted that they would find a machine plant at their disposal. Two days saw them panting into the Northwestern station and descending to greet the grinning Arkel. Thirty minutes found Bernice laughing and sobbing in the arms of her father, and Stillman and Darling on their way to the apartments of Gilson.

Haste became the keynote of the day.

Meade Stillman absolutely refused to talk terms with

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Gilson. He alleged that he had come to save his country, and that no other price would be accepted beyond her complete release from the invading nation. He was still the idealist Bernice had called him. He had yet to learn the ways of the outer world.

Gilson, too harassed to dicker, accepted his offer, and it was decided to build three machines at first, because of Stillman's limited supply of the necessary radium. At Darling's suggestion, an entire engineering plant had been prepared and a corps of assistants selected.

The day following Stillman's arrival saw the first step taken toward the miracle's materialization.

At Gethelds' own insistence, Stillman made his quarters in the Colonel's home. He accepted the love of his daughter for Meade with little comment, save for a far-away look in the eyes. He had known it must come some day, and he had known Meade's father and loved him.

But Meade made little use of the room set apart for his convenience. For days at a time he lived and slept at the works.

Bernice, at first elated at the thought of having him near her, gradually became a victim to anxious worry, as each time she saw him for a few brief moments she noticed the steady whitening of his face, the growing lines of firmness about his lips, the loss of their easy curve of mental contentment, the progressive narrowing of his lids in the lines of concentration.

As for Stillman himself, he plunged from the first into a maelstrom of explanation, planning, advising, and supervising, which kept him at a continual fever pitch of active working.

That first day, at a consultation with his associate engineers, it was decided to build the framework of the

aëro-destroyers of vanadium steel, combining lightness with great strength. It was here that Stillman's real quality first began to show. Knowing, as they did from the process of their selection as his staff assistants, the sort of man they were to meet, his engineers were surprised at the mass of technical knowledge he brought to his task. Whatever he might be in appearance and manner, this was no innocent dreamer from the woods.

The years of training which his father had given now stood him in good stead with these men of practical affairs. Within his chosen field they found him their equal in all, their superior in several ways. More than that, he manifested a certain ability at organization, which began to bring results almost from the first.

The offices set apart for the engineering staff became the scene of an activity indicative of his driving energy and force. A great part of his enthusiasm and faith in the structure he was to produce reflected from the men who worked under his instruction, and came to pervade their endeavors by day and night.

And by day and night the work went on.

'All night the lights glowed in the offices of the works, where men, swift at technical and mechanical precision, took the original blue-prints and drafted the patterns of parts which must be molded for the castings. During the first three days Meade Stillman never left the office. With a green shade over his eyes at night and, later, with a cloth dampened at a faucet bound about his brows by day, he drove, drove, drove the wielders of pencil and ruler and square, while the first principal patterns were worked out and sent down to be made.

On the third night he flung himself down on the floor beneath a table, with his coat for a pillow, and slept.

Twice in that time Bernice came and urged him to

come back home with her. Each time he kissed her and sent her away, with her growing worry gnawing at her heart. On the morning of the fourth day he telephoned that he had slept at the works the night before, and would be up to see her that afternoon.

When he came she drew him into her arms and made him lie down upon a couch and took his head into her lap. He laughed into her face from tired eyes.

"I don't want to lie down. I don't want to nap," he protested in a boyish manner. "I brought a motor. I want you to come out and drive me about as you did that first afternoon I knew you. I want to go round and round."

"I should think your head would be going round and round," she told him, smiling softly.

"It is," he admitted. "You must drive me round the other way till it stops. Biddy dear, I want fresh air and — you. Things are started. I shall sleep here to-night, after I leave the works."

Womanlike, she yielded and he had his way.

She took him far out through parks and along the Lake Shore Drive. When they returned he insisted on dinner at a down-town café, drove her home at its end, and went back to the plant. By twelve he came back.

"We pour the first casting to-morrow," he announced in satisfied excitement. At six the next morning he was up, and had left the house before she came down. But he had left a note telling her that he had telephoned to Darling, asking him to bring her out to the works to witness the first pouring.

When they arrived Meade met them in working costume. He wore a soft shirt open at the collar and a pair of trousers belted about his lean hips. He led them into an immense gloomy interior, where great fires

had been flaring for hours, melting the metals which were to form the keel beams of the aëro-destroyers.

The roar of their reverberations in the mighty cupolas well-nigh drowned their voices.

The forms of the molds lay ready stretched upon the floors beyond the fiery caldrons where the molten metal bubbled and frothed. Meade stationed them where they might see — on a little raised iron platform — and went down to superintend the actual pouring.

At his signal men, naked save for belted trousers and shoes, their torsos the bodies of hairy giants in that place of gloom and fire, sprang to action. The glowing vents of the cupels opened and sent forth sparkling streams of metal, which fell into buckets swung beneath them from great movable cranes.

A myriad sparks, a myriad glowing blobs of metal, formed the spray of those streams. They leaped into the buckets and filled them. With a clank the cranes swung them into motion.

They swayed away toward the empty mouths of the molds. Their surface smoked with an iridescent vapor from their filming contents. The hand of the woman who watched contracted upon the iron rail of the platform where she stood.

The first bucket swung above the intake of the mold of a mighty beam. High overhead, the chains which held the bucket clanked harshly. The bucket fell swiftly into position. It tipped. Across its lip leaped the glowing mass of its contents.

It struck and sank into the mold made ready to receive it. The smoke of its going rose in a swirling vapor above it. It was the first bucket. The first mold of the miracle was poured.

"At last, at last," breathed Bernice, and turned to

Harold. "We have witnessed the miracle's conception," she said.

Thereafter the furnaces flared without cessation, and the forges growled and rumbled. Three days after the first mold was poured the first step was taken in actual building.

The keels of the three great destroyers were laid down inside the rising walls of an immense shed which was to house them. A cordon of troops was thrown about the entire plant, and no one allowed to approach without a pass. In every way precautions were taken to protect the growing means of the country's strength from observation.

They began to grow apace.

Out of the flare of the fires which glowed ruddy above their cradle all night; out of the labor of brain and body; out of the roar and the glare, the constant working and striving; out of the pain and sweat of a mass of toiling men, the miracle was slowly rising to a concrete thing.

With the completion of the preliminary work and the beginning of the casting, Meade gave himself to the work of supervision. Here, there, about the great plant he appeared in his open-throated shirt and belted trousers, advising, ordering, suggesting, even taking his place with the toilers by hand and giving them the benefit of his seemingly tireless strength.

No detail became too trivial for his close attention, none seemed to escape him, as the days ran into weeks and weeks became months. Day or night, none knew when the lithe figure of the inventor would drop down among them with questions which snapped with insistence or questions which straightened a confusion into intelligent purpose and understanding.

In a way it seemed that his own development kept pace with the strange creations he was building. He walked in a different manner, spoke in a different way, acted and thought unlike the man who had come from the desert oasis.

A month passed, two, three.

November had gone, December, and January had come in and fled swiftly. Long before this Meade Stillman had surrendered a large part of the actual supervision of construction to his associates, and transferred his attention to the preparation of the radio-active gravity screens. The original chemists' laboratory of the works had been converted into the work-room where he conducted his efforts toward the lifting devices of the monster air-ships, whose steel hulls were now taking definite shape.

This was the only part of the entire undertaking of which he made any secret.

But the laboratory was as carefully guarded as a mint. Special officers and a company of infantry were always on guard about it. Even the regular assistants which necessity forced upon him approached only after a supervision of their pass-cards and a correct replying to a pass-word changed from day to day.

Of these helpers, whom he gathered about him in the supreme work of his task, the chief was a man by the name of Belden — an old man, with white hair and a smooth-shaven chin, in whose pale blue eyes alone remained any apparent fire. Stoop-shouldered, and slow of speech, Belden was a finished technical engineer, with a thorough knowledge of chemistry and electrical application.

Meade himself had picked him out of some dozen men suggested for the place, and found him all he could de-

sire. In fact, the interest which he manifested in the work was second only to Stillman's own.

Between them they took the precious substance Meade had brought from the oasis and began to fashion it into the screens.

A second bond of sympathy drew them together. On a day when Meade first began work on the actual construction of a screen, Belden had cried out at the knowledge he saw unveiled:

"A wonderful brain — a mind of genius devised this!" he exclaimed, his pale eyes lighting. "Is it your conception, Mr. Stillman?"

"My father's," said Meade. "We worked it out together."

"He still lives then?" began Belden, and paused. Meade started. "Lives?" he questioned. "Yes. Why do you ask?"

Belden did not reply for a moment. He seemed to be turning something in his mind. "I knew him," he said at length. "He had a shrewd intelligence."

"In a scientific way, yes," Meade responded quickly, "You must have known him a long time ago."

Belden nodded. "Before his trouble came upon him," he said.

"He was innocent," challenged the son sharply. "I always was assured of that," said Belden. "That was one reason I was glad when you gave me this position."

On impulse Meade whirled and thrust out a hand. Belden took it and pressed it in a feeble clasp. From that time a warmer feeling grew in the younger man's heart for the elder as the days sped by and the first set of screens was finished.

It was on that day that Belden voiced an opinion

of the screens themselves. "Do you know," he asked in his slow way, "that I think you've stumbled upon a lost art in these, Meade boy?"

Meade looked his question out of tired eyes. The pace he had set for himself and the others was beginning to tell. Sometimes at night now he crept to Bernice and sought the comfort of her touch upon his forehead as he pillow'd his head in her lap and spoke softly of the progress in the task at which he strove.

Belden went on: "You know it has always puzzled the scientific world to explain how the Egyptians and those ancient peoples moved their immense monoliths from their quarries to their place of use. I believe they had some secret such as this. Put a plate of this sort under a modern building and you could pick it up and carry it where you willed."

"They were wise, those men of ancient times. Perhaps — There's a fortune in this discovery aside from the air-ships, Meade. If I were you I'd take a set of formulas and place them in a mighty safe place, and then destroy all our working notes."

Stillman laughed.

"Small good the plates would do any one unless he knew how to wire them," he said in some excitement. "That was my idea at the last. If they aren't wired right, they won't work, and I intend doing the wiring after they're in position. You will help, Belden, of course, but no one else."

"I might steal the idea, too, Meade," Belden chuckled.

"You might," said Stillman; "but I don't believe you'd rob an innocent man of his labors. You're no thug, Belden. You're more like dad himself."

"I was at least," said Belden. A spasm of something like pain twitched his sallow face.

For three months the forges had thundered. For three months, bit by bit, the steel framework of the monsters had been fitted into place. For three months a ceaseless energy, a ceaseless drive, had held the men who labored at their building. For three months the men at the head of the nation had waited and played the game on the national chess-board while they waited.

That they had played well was shown by the fact that the Japanese had not materially improved their position in that time. Their lines had advanced slightly in some districts, but seemed unable to push farther in the face of the ceaseless harassment to which their flanks were constantly subjected.

Now the fires in the forges died, the furnaces ceased to roar. The last casting, the last bit of forging was done.

Meade Stillman, white of face, leaner, thinner, harder than ever before, stood in the shed and watched the side-plates swung into position on the concrete things of his dream.

It seemed to him that the ringing blows of the pneumatics were not only driving home the rivets in the giant frames, which rose above him as he stood leaning forward on wide-spread limbs, but that they were fastening into the mass with each blow, something of the youth, the strength, the hopes, the high ambitions, which had been his in the oasis; and that with each blow they robbed him of some of the old naturalness of thought and feeling, and left him a little more like the men about him, a little better able to cope with things as he found them; perhaps a little bit more able to win his country's battle and then remove the cloud from

the name of his father and bring another exile back from his place in the hills.

And each blow toward the completion brought nearer that day when he should win the right to return to Bernice and claim the fulfillment of her promise. He smiled, and some of the tire of tension went out of his eyes for the time.

The work of assembling went on space, with the same ceaseless drive which had characterized all the rest of the undertaking. Little figures of men crawled over the framework of the ships like spiders in a web.

The sound of their endeavors made an inferno of noise in the shed where they worked. Night and day, day and night, the rivets flashed to the "gunmen," were driven home and welded the parts into a whole. The mighty hollow diamonds began to take more solid aspect as their sheathing of steel was fastened to their ribs.

Huge, uncouth, unlike anything the world of war had heretofore witnessed, they were coming into being. The pygmy thing which had called them into existence walked to and fro among them, speaking a word of direction here, a word of caution or insistence there.

A pipe between his teeth at times eased the tire of his muscles and brain. Over and between the growing structures the blue arcs sputtered by night and oftentimes by day when the light was dull. At such times the great shed became a cavern where gnomes toiled at an endless task.

By now another task was added to Meade's already heavy burden. In another part of the city the magnetic bombs, which were to furnish the ammunition of the destroyers, were being prepared. Each day now, Stillman entered a speedy machine and was driven to

the ammunition factory to supervise the most important of the details attending their production.

Sometimes he stopped and took Bernice with him, that her presence, the sound of her voice, might rest him and give him back something of poise. More than she knew, her influence helped to perfect the mighty engines of war.

And though neither of them knew it, Fate was working her purpose with the man. There were times when the brain which answered a thousand daily questions, solved a thousand points of unforeseen perplexity, was not entirely normal; when the strain and the tire had worn its finer bearings until they no longer ran quite true.

Little by little, as Bernice watched him growing thinner, sterner of face, deeper of eye, and fretted in wakeful nights, while he, equally sleepless, labored, he was being changed into the man who must take one of these monster constructions, and with it go forth to the slaying of other men. The Meade Stillman who came back from the oasis could not have done it in cold-blooded purpose without an ordeal of compunction. The Stillman who worked obsessed by that purpose, could and would, when his work at the plant was done.

And now, by the middle of February, the last plate was in position, the firing tubes for the shells were in place, the interior controls and driving plants were installed. All and everything was nearing completion, and a force of men, slung in swings, mounted on stages, were painting the hulls a bright azure blue, which should make them well nigh invisible against a clear sky.

Save for installing the radio-active plates, little remained to be done, and Meade estimated that a week would see this, too, completed.

But rapid as had been the work, swift as had been the pace at which bone and muscle and brain had driven forward under the urging of need, the Japanese again struck with their usual selection of the unprepared moment, before their antagonist was fully ready for the blow.

During the weeks and months, when Meade drove his men to their tasks and himself to the point of collapse, the heads of the nation had not been idle. Every nerve was bent to the mobilization of an immense army near Hagerstown in the State of Maryland.

Men, arms, and ammunition in immense quantities were collected at this point in an apparent preparation for an active campaign with the breaking up of winter. Japan picked up the gauntlet at once.

With her usual rapidity she centralized her Eastern forces so far as consistently possible, and, relying upon her advantage in the aerial torpedo-bombs — which had so far done such effective work — advanced northward from Washington along the Potomac, sweeping the countryside as she went and preparing for a decisive struggle, which she hoped would break the organized resistance it had taken the States months to build up. Horse, foot, and guns, she threw forward fifty thousand men in her army.

They faced a hundred thousand volunteer troops, built up about a nucleus of veteran soldiers, the remnants of the original regular army.

But Japan's fifty thousand were trained and seasoned fighters; and the new weapon, which she brought with her in great quantities on her advance, gave her more than an advantage. She took Harper's Ferry as a base and conducted her field movements from there.

By the eighteenth of the month it became evident

that she intended to precipitate an engagement; that the strategy of the United States, which had aimed at causing her to centralize her forces, had been successful; but that it behooved them to be ready for her next move, lest they be caught in an unbreakable grip before they themselves expected.

With somewhat anxious minds an inquiry was sent from the Strategy Board to Meade on the eighteenth, asking for a definite date of completion for the aero-destroyers. He replied that he would finish by the night of the twenty-first.

Already he had planned a christening of his machines for Washington's birthday, and was positive that he would be ready if every minute was used.

Bernice and Darling and he had even adopted the names. The original machine, the first laid down, was to be called the "Miracle," and Meade had been specially commissioned to command her. The second would be known as the "Bernice," and would be captained by Darling, with Arkel as his lieutenant. And the third was to be named "The Stillman," with Monsel, who had resigned from the Board for the purpose, as her governing head.

The Strategy Board received Stillman's report and acted in accord.

Word was sent to the commanders in the field to avoid any general engagement until the machines were ready. It is a matter of record that they tried, until such time as it became a choice of abandoning what appeared to be an advantageous position and retreating in the face of a strong and aggressive foe, with the attendant perils of such a movement.

Throughout the morning of the twentieth Japan massed her fighting men along the entire front of the

American position. Numerous skirmishes occurred between scouting parties of either side, and it became absolutely certain that the Orientals were advancing to an immediate attack.

Word was flashed to Chicago, and after a serious deliberation orders were given to hold the present position rather than fall back farther.

About 2 p. m. on the twentieth Japan opened her attack by a turning movement directed against the American right flank. Until nightfall the battle raged fiercely with a frightful loss on the American side, due mostly to the long range work of the aerial bombs, which burst above their positions with telling effect.

The most spectacular event of the day was the work of Colonel Gotz's newly organized aviation squad, numbering a hundred fliers.

At the beginning of the attack they rose and engaged a squad of the Japanese air-men, delivering a terrible punishment upon them, until the battle in the air was stopped by the flight of the Orientals and the directing of the aerial bombs against the American machines. Some twenty of these were literally blown to atoms, and the rest returned inside their own lines.

Meade had run up to Gethelds' for dinner when the word was received detailing the American's partial defeat and the doubling back of their right wing. Gethelds was at the Board, which had held him since morning. It was a message from that body, relayed from the plant, which gave the information. They were urging, begging, pleading, for haste in his completion of the machines.

He came back from the 'phone, white-lipped, spoke briefly to Bernice of the message, and picked up a glass of wine beside his plate. At a gulp he tossed it off

and set down the glass. "I must go, dear," he said quickly. "I've promised them to try and hurry. Good-by."

"Hurry," grated the girl. "Oh, it's been nothing but hurry, hurry, hurry, since the start. Can't they realize that you're human — that you're flesh and bone; that you tire; that you're worked to skin and bone with their hurry now? Oh, Meade dear, you can't go all night again. You're on the verge of collapse. Your eyes are so tired, dear — even your voice is tired."

"Don't," he interrupted. "I can stand another night. I must. Can't you see that they've struck before we were ready, sweetheart? Do you know that twenty thousand brave men died or were wounded today, Bernice? Twenty thousand! What is my tire to that, little woman? Come, kiss me, and let me go. They need me."

All night he drove as he had never driven.

Soaking in perspiration, his hair disheveled, his face doubly white under the smudges of his exertions; together with Belden he worked in the skin of the Miracle, installing the plates. Midnight came, and he paused to drink a cup of scalding hot coffee. Morning came, and he labored on, hollow-eyed.

Noon came, and he swept a hand across his brow when he straightened to check the dizzy whirling of his brain. He sent out for the latest reports from the front, where men were holding grimly on and waiting for him to finish. He heard them and plunged back to his work, strengthened and driven by the thought that each minute of it was being bought by at least one human life.

At six o'clock he straightened and turned to Belden with a ghastly smile of triumph. While the old man

waited, he touched a lever and threw it slightly backward, as one moves the lever of a throttle. A quiver shook the fabric in which they were standing.

It lifted slightly and swung, perhaps, a foot from the floor of the shed. "It is finished," said Stillman quite calmly. "Can you finish the others to-night and to-morrow if I take the *Miracle* to-night?"

Belden's eyes flashed assurance. "I will finish," he replied.

Outside, in the shed, a babble of cries and shouts and questions had arisen among the workmen who had seen the great ship lifting. They gathered about her door and waited until Meade appeared, with Belden behind him.

A mighty cheer burst from their throats, and they pressed about him, reaching for his hands. At another time it would have given him elation, now it seemed to him that he was too utterly tired. He walked with such speed as he could muster to the 'phone and informed the waiting Board that he was ready.

"Give me Monsel for my lieutenant this first trip. His machine isn't ready," he requested. "The ammunition is aboard and the crew waiting."

"Can you go without a trial?" came the question.

"I will," he said shortly, and hung up.

He rose, turned, and drew a heavy ulster over his sweat-soaked clothing, went down, and was driven to Bernice.

"Sweetheart," he whispered, drawing her close and feeling her quiver against him.

She led him down and compelled him to eat, sitting beside him, not to lose a moment of his nearness. Her lips were bright as with fever, her eyes wide with a tragedy of thought, yet the hand which touched his was of

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icy coldness, and it quivered and shook. "You are going — to-night?" she whispered dryly, with a faltering tongue.

"As soon as I may," he answered. "I ought to be gone now, but I have driven to the last grain of endurance. I had to catch my breath, and I had to see you."

"But you haven't tried the Miracle yet," she objected. "You are doubling the danger. If something should be wrong. Oh, Meade, I am so frightened."

"Nothing is wrong," he spoke with assurance. "And they need me over there. Dear heart, they need me so much. Have you seen the results of to-day's battle?"

She nodded dumbly.

"Thirty thousand lost — our army retreating," he muttered. "What is the risk when they need me like that?"

"It is all my life to me, Meade," she faltered. "Oh, I know I am only one woman, and that what I say is selfish. I know that those women care as much for their men as I do for you — perhaps. But you're mine — mine — and it was I brought you to do this thing. Oh, Meade, Meade — promise me that you'll come back — to me." She paused, biting her lips, fighting back her tears.

"Come back to *you*," said Stillman. "I'll come back to you, Bernice, in spite of all the yellow fiends out of perdition. Now, good-by, my own little wife. Come — Good-by."

CHAPTER XVIII

ALL FOR HIS COUNTRY

THE night of the twenty-first was a night of horror with the American army in the field. After the reverse of the twentieth, on which the right wing had been shattered by the Japanese attack, it became necessary to fall back and take up a new position to the northeast of that originally held.

The result was that the engagement of the twenty-first was fought a good many miles nearer the historic town of Gettysburg than that of the preceding day. And the second day was a greater exhibition of unrestrained slaughter than the one before.

For the first time the Japanese came to close quarters, hurling their infantry at the American lines, in an endeavor to sweep them before their assault; showering the positions with their artillery fire, sending their aero-planes above them, and engaging the American flyers. In addition the aerial bombs kept up their deadly work.

By nightfall of the twenty-first there was but one thought actuating the minds of the American Commander and his staff, and that was to hold on somehow until the long-heralded aero-destroyers should arrive.

But the holding on was becoming a troublesome question. Already fifty thousand men were killed or wounded by the two days' fighting. Half the available strength which had faced the Japanese had been destroyed.

So far as known Japan had lost but slightly, her

main casualties having occurred in the charges of the second day, when she had apparently sought to crush all resistance at once, rather than by degrees, as she must have thought she could. With fifty thousand, any longer resistance was not to be thought of.

It was decided to fall back still further toward Gettysburg, and compel the enemy to follow, in the hopes that the inevitable defeat might be postponed, or the aëro-destroyer arrive during the next day, as promised.

During the night every road leading north from the field of battle became a congested highway of travel. The weather had been typical of the month, and the red clay grew into a feet- and wheel-churned batter, through which infantry plodded and cavalry splashed.

Field guns and caissons, their horses lunging and straining under the frantic lashing of the artillery drivers, rushed along them, careening into ruts and out again, with a lurch and a bang, the gunners clinging to the jouncing trucks, or leaping down to wallow in the cold wet mud and the darkness, and lift them from some hole too deep for the panting horses to overcome.

Giant armored motors, carrying aerial guns for the defense against aeroplanes, throbbed along the column; mired to the hubs, and grew into the centers of a mass of straining, sweating, cursing men, who strove to free them and send them forward.

Here and there a fire lighted from a fence or a confiscated out-house of some farm, sent ruddy flares across the darkness, and silhouetted a halted huddle of chilled figures, seeking to cluster nearer to its warmth.

One thing, and only one, relieved that agony of human suffering, toil, and endeavor. The night was cloudy, partly veiling in its murky thickness, the toiling columns from any chance aeroplane, which the en-

emy might send up as a scout, and to add to the already dreadful slaughter, by dropping bombs upon the hurrying masses of men.

Throughout the night both sides did keep several planes in the air, however, and now and then they met. Now and then the sound of shots fell down from the cloudy heavens, and tiny dots of fire showed where human passions rose high above the earth and locked in strife.

Now and then a crumpled thing of cloth and rods and stays hurtled downward, and crashed dully upon the sodden fields above which it had flown, and lay there a monument of defeat.

Yet as dawn approached, it became evident that the army would win to the new position selected for it. Little by little the struggling columns converged upon their assigned destination. Batteries of artillery swung from the rutted roads, at the signal of a drawn-faced aide, and turned into fields, to drop their trails and leave their guns in position for the first attack of the oncoming foe.

Their caissons were parked behind them, and their gunners dropped down about them, for a few precious moments of sleep. Regiments shuffled to right and left, this way and that; and having reached their assigned location for the last desperate grapple, sank on their arms and rested.

The morning broke heavily overclouded, with a mist-like cloud of chilled vapor shrouding the lower swales and hollows. The first of the aëroplane scouts darted up, and whirred off to the south on the outlook for the Japanese advance. Tiny fires sprang up along the American position, where the troops were making some sort of shift at a warm drink or a bite to eat.

All commissariat arrangements had fallen inadequate in that hurried retreat to this new and final position. It was this row of twinkling fire flares through the mist which first met the eyes of Meade and Monsel, as they swam high above the plain.

The latter's hand fell on Meade's arm, where he sat at the controls of the Miracle. His face was tense with excitement as he pointed below. "Do you see it, Stillman?" he whispered, as though his words might carry too far. "We're over some position. The question is, whose?"

Meade nodded. Beneath them a dim shadow flitted by to the south.

"Aéroplane," said Stillman. "Scout going south. We're above our own lines, I believe, old man." He cut out the driving motors. The Miracle floated over the fire-lit mists. "I understood they were to fall back toward Gettysburg, and by the chart that's where we are right now, Monsel. I think we have arrived."

Very slowly he let the giant thing he controlled sink downward. Softly, silently, without a tremor, it settled toward the line of fires. A hundred feet from the ground he checked it.

Peering downward, Monsel and he could see the groups of shivering men huddled on the ground about the little blazes. Behind them the crew of the air-ship pressed and gazed in excited interest. Meade turned to a speaking megaphone in the side of the ship.

Until then not one of the men below them had glanced up to where they hung. He sent his voice out in a hail.

Heads were lifted, turned, raised upward. To the men below it seemed that a something, half seen, dim, ghostly, immense, hung above them. Numb by cold and tire, they stood and sought to make it out.

Again Meade spoke: "What regiment is that?"

The English-speaking voice seemed to wake understanding. "Fifth Pennsylvania," some one answered. "Who are you?"

"The Stillman air-ship. I want field headquarters," called Meade. "Which way from here?"

A sergeant pointed. "Over there—mile and a half," he directed, and added a question: "You ain't th' Miracle, are you? Say—you ain't—"

"Yes." Stillman touched his levers, and the ghost shape vanished in the fog and headed in the direction the sergeant had pointed. Out of that fog came a sudden cheering. Above the soft purr of the motors the men in the destroyer heard it.

It swelled and seemed to run beneath them as they flew, keeping pace, as the word of the arrival spread from regiment to regiment throughout the far-flung front.

In the headquarters tent the American commander raised his head as the sound of that cheering stole inside. "What's that?" he snapped shortly to one of his staff. "It sounds like cheering, but what for? God knows we've little to cheer about. And yet—By Heavens it is!"

He sprang to his feet.

The excited face of an aide appeared at the fly of the tent. He saluted in a scarcely correct manner and burst into speech. "There's something coming down, sir. It ain't no aëroplane, an' I don't know what it is, but it's pretty big. It looks like a dirigible, but—"

His words died as the General, forgetting all dignity or pose, leaped toward the outer world and raised his eyes aloft.

There, scarcely fifty feet up and steadily descending,

he saw a vast outline, like a Brobdingnagian torpedo. While he watched it grounded without sound, and a door flew open in its side. Two men stepped forth to confront him.

He in advance brought a hand smartly to salute and began speaking: "General, I have to report the Miracle arrived."

The General seized the hand of the man who had addressed him. "Thank God that it has, sir," he responded with feeling.

"I was to report to you for orders," said Meade. "You know Captain Monsel?"

"By report," the General acknowledged, shaking hands. "Stillman, are you ready for action?"

"All ready, General," Meade smiled.

The clouds in the east began breaking. Through them a bar of sunlight shot across the landscape. The gray mists trembled beneath its touch. Meade raised his face to the upper heavens and saw blue sky.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "With a clear sky I can come above them like a spirit of retribution whenever you give the word."

An air scout shot whirring out of the south, circled and slid down in front of the headquarters' tent. "Sir," he began, and stopped in sheer surprise at the thing he saw. In a moment, however, he caught himself and reported the Japanese as coming up rapidly from the south.

All along the east the clouds were breaking. A gentle wind began to fan about the men as they stood, and lifted the ensign above the General's tent.

Meade smiled and nodded to Monsel in satisfaction. Before the wind the mist was rolling up like a mighty curtain and showing the waiting army stretched far

beyond them. From somewhere, far away, came a little crackle of rifle-fire.

The General swept his gaze around. "The clouds are breaking, I think," he remarked.

Stillman answered him, smiling: "You are right, sir; the clouds *are* breaking." There was a double meaning to his words.

Several dark little spots appeared above the southern horizon and rushed down upon them. They were Japanese air scouts, hovering along their army's front.

They came on with the confidence of former success. A bugle sounded. A roaring whir broke out on the air.

A dozen American planes rose and darted toward the others. Suddenly the aerial gun on an armored motor woke into action, firing small explosive shells at the enemy's machines. The crackle of rifle fire to the south and west was growing more steady and gaining in volume.

Far off in that direction a great flash lit up the heavens. A thunderous roar beat upon the ears.

"An aerial bomb," said the General in explanation to Meade.

Scarcely had he spoken when a second flash and report woke the echoes in the direction of the American aëroplanes which had risen against the Japanese. It passed and showed a tattered ruin swirling dizzily around and around, like a wounded bird, as it fell.

Meade's teeth closed with a snap, and he turned to his superior in unspoken question.

The General nodded. "Any time you are ready, Stillman," he said.

Meade smiled in a manner almost savage and swung on his heel. "Come on, Monsel," he directed, and strode to the Miracle's side. In that moment his one

thought, his one wish, his one determination, was to carry a terrible vengeance to his country's foes.

Under his manipulation of the levers the Miracle leaped aloft. The sun had come quite clear, and they rose against a clear sky. As suddenly as though it had faded into thin air, the giant fabric which had rested before them vanished from the sight of the General and his clustering staff.

The General gasped. "What—" he began, and lowered his gaze to the faces of the men about him.

"It was blue—I think that against this sky we can't—"

"My God! You can't see it because of its color. But it's up there," stammered the Commander. "And the Japs—they can't see it, either." He uncased a pair of binoculars and fastened them on the distant forces of the enemy, now beginning to appear here and there.

Meade sent the Miracle straight up for a thousand feet. When the aneroid showed that elevation, he switched in the turbines which dragged the great ship forward and slid away into the south, toward the flying dots of the Japanese air-ships. Below him, without suspecting that he flew above him, the American machines were flying and signaling the position of the advancing forces.

The last of the mist had risen and melted away.

The men in the Miracle could see the troops of their nation ranged across the landscape. In response to the signals of the air scouts, a regiment of infantry sprang to life and raced off to some new position, where they might be more effective in meeting some movement of the approaching forces.

A body of cavalry, which Monsel recognized as the

"Black Horse" and named, raced flounderingly across the fields, their guidons fluttering like tiny specks of color, their horses seeming more like flattened shadows than animals as they rode, to those who looked from above. Plainly they were also changing front for some purpose dictated by the man who moved them like pieces on the chessboard of war.

Without warning, their galloping mass was blotted temporarily out by a sheet of flame.

It was so sudden, so unexpected, that Monsel gasped. There had been nothing to lead one to expect that blinding flash in the lower air. In front or on the flank of the horse there had been no sign of an enemy.

The menace of that explosion had certainly come from a distance. Peering down, he waited until he could see through the haze of the explosion. His eye fell upon a confused tangle of men and horses struggling to free themselves from or avoid the mangled remnants of what seemed to Monsel an entire troop of their command.

With a grip in his throat he understood now, from personal observation, why it was that the American armies had suffered one continual defeat — why each and every commander of their forces had said over and over again: "We can't get at them."

The bomb which had torn a score of men and horses to pieces had come from far, far away, aimed and timed to strike and burst with hellish precision. Monsel's gorge rose at this, to him, almost cowardly slaughter of men by an enemy who remained beyond range of danger and mercilessly blew them to pieces.

He turned to Stillman. "Hit it up, and let's give them a taste," he begged.

Meade increased the Miracle's speed. They swept

forward. The row of Japanese planes were no longer spots, but outlines now. Stillman nodded to Monsel. "Use the small canister shells," he said.

The Captain turned. His voice rang through the interior of the destroyer in crisp command:

"Load — tubes!"

Ten men leaped into action, like hounds from the leash. From the ammunition boxes, standing ready with open lids, they lifted numbers of the magnetic bombs and thrust them into the pneumatic tubes which were to vomit them forth. A soft sighing whispered through the ship as the air in the tubes was compressed behind them.

Monsel passed down the rows of men at the tubes and spoke in direction: "One-tenth compression on the bottoms, quarter sides, half rear. Steady now, boys. We want these things to just drop all over this air fleet of theirs, and pick out their own marks by means of their magnetic finders. When I give the word, sides fire first, bottoms second, and rear last, at intervals of two counts. Watch my hand. I'll give you the intervals."

The Miracle was rising. She shot up to five hundred feet above where the Japanese fliers were circling above their army's advance. She slowed. Beneath her the little planes darted to and fro. Meade nodded.

Monsel's lips snarled back. "Fire!" rang his command. His hand began to bob up and down — one, two — one, two.

Plop — Plop — Plop! coughed the side tubes, the bottoms, the rear. A swarm of little shells darted from the great destroyer and spread beneath and beyond her. She sprang forward swiftly.

Behind and below her rose a rending crackle of ex-

plosions in the air. Each little bomb plunged downward like a vindictive hornet, seeking a mark for its sting. The magnets in their heads drew them toward the metalized parts of the Japanese planes. They darted in and struck and clung and exploded. A series of flashes sparkled along the line of fliers, like daylight fireworks exploding.

And the sting of the metal hornets was deadly. The airships seemed to vanish into the air.

It became full of tattered strings and fragments which had been men and machines. A bloody rain, mixed with pieces of cloth, and metal, and flesh, began dropping downward upon the heads of the Japanese advance.

It passed. Men and officers glanced aloft. They saw the flashes, they heard the explosions, they saw their airmen vanish — and nothing else. Above them the sky was clear and blue and golden with sunshine—empty now of even their own planes which had flown there.

Off to the south and west a Japanese battery was coming up, its horses toiling to drag it through the mud, its men laboring with them and straining at the miring wheels. Meade swung the Miracle toward it. He spoke to Monsel: "The little shells are the stuff for aeroplanes, all right, Captain. Now I think I'll eliminate that artillery over yonder. Load with small shell again for that." He sent the destroyer toward the line of the battery's advance.

Once more Monsel's voice barked an order. Again the pneumatics sighed as they received once more the clusters of small missiles, such as they had sprayed over the vanished planes.

Once more Stillman checked his momentum and swung above the foredoomed string of guns. Monsel,

with range-finder at eye, cried his directions to the tube pointers: "One thousand down, five hundred forward, fronts and bottoms. Have you got it?"

"All set, sir," panted a pointer.

"Then — let go!"

Plop!

A deluge of flame, a rending tempest of destruction struck upon horses and men and guns. Again the hornets stung them, and their sting was death. They fell downward and stuck to the muzzles of guns, to the metal tires of wheels, and exploded. The flash of their explosion died and left behind it ruin, the twitching leg of a dying horse, the scattered bodies of quiet or writhing men.

The Miracle leaped aloft — a thousand — two thousand feet, and paused.

And almost as she paused, in the air above the riven battery, a flash of light tore across the air. Another and another followed in blinding flash and rending concussion.

Stillman turned to Monsel, and a grim smile twitched his somewhat pallid lips. "I think that was something like an inspiration," he remarked. "They got the idea pretty quickly and pretty nearly got at us with their bombs."

"But the range — How could they know where —" began the Captain.

"Saw us," said Meade. "I forgot for the moment that we're between them and the sun. Our color don't help us under those conditions. Well, no matter. They missed, and we're way up now."

With a jerk he threw in his motors and sent the Miracle into the west like the darting flash of a hawk. "We're going to get 'em, Monsel," he whispered with

a hissing intonation. "Get them — get them. Big shell now, Monsel. I'm going after their damnable bombs."

Like a great shell herself, the Miracle shot forward.

Through the windows of the floor and sides Monsel could look down and forward. The Miracle had swept west and turned, and was coming back into the eye of the sun.

Below their advance stretched a grouping of Japanese about several long-barreled weapons, into which, as he watched, they were thrusting slender torpedo-shaped missiles, which he knew must be the dreaded aerial bombs. Once discharged, they would unfold their wings and fly on their mission of death.

Even as he recognized the thought, lanyards snapped. A faint haze of smokeless powder rose from the tilting muzzles of the great rifles, and their crews fell upon them for reloading.

Behind them an ammunition-train stood parked, and from it other men were running to and fro with the bombs for the now open breeches.

"Get their range," snapped Stillman in a voice of supreme excitement.

"Five hundred down, a thousand forward!" called Monsel. His tones quivered.

"Five hundred down, a thousand forward!" barked the pointers.

Stillman swung the Miracle about. "Hold hard; we'll get the concussion from this," he advised. "Now — if you're ready — Fire!"

"Fire!" echoed Monsel.

The magnetic shells sprayed forward and down.

The Miracle shot upward to escape what must follow. Below, where the great guns rested, where the ammunition was parked, where the crews ran back and

forth from caisson to gun, or thrust the aërials into the breeches, a vast, wide-flung sheet of fire and blue and yellow flames burst and spread into a whirlpool of thunderous sound.

For an instant it seemed that some long-hidden and prisoned volcano had burst its bounds and spouted forth in a great pool of gaseous brilliance. Beneath that flaming maelstrom of death, little black figures which were men ran and stumbled and fell and lay still, or, caught in its grasp, whirled madly with outflung arms and spraddling legs, swirling around and around, and over and over in the air, to fall back and lie in mangled huddles; or, still more savagely seized by an irresistible force of destruction, disintegrated into ghastly fragments which had been arms or legs or trunks a moment before.

What the magnetics had started, their concussion finished by exploding a great part of the aërial bombs themselves.

A thunderous concussion rose and grumbled, crashed and growled across the sunlit country. A tremor of the earth itself began and spread in shaking ripples, which might have been an earthquake in its seeming.

A vast wave of displaced air, compressed, forced back from the rarefied center of the disturbance, swept across the district until trees and bushes bent and swayed, and men within its range were thrown to earth.

High though it rode, the Miracle which had wrought the frightful cataclysm of wind and noise and fire, rocked and swayed, and but for her powerful gyroscopes, which kept it on an even keel, would have been engulfed in the destruction of its own making. Kneeling upon its floor, Monsel covered his eyes to shut out the picture below.

"Hail, Columbia, happy land!
Hail, ye heroes, heaven-born band,
Who fought and bled —"

The sound of some one singing struck upon his ear.
He uncovered his eyes and staggered to his feet.

Meade Stillman sat at the controls, gazing below at
the devastation induced by the Miracle's fire, and sing-
ing the words of the national anthem.

Monsel ran forward. A dreadful fear for Stillman's
mental balance, strained through months, assailed him.
What, he asked himself, if a madman sat at the Mira-
cle's helm?

"When war spreads her wide desolation."
He reached Stillman's side. "Stillman! Meade!" he gasped.

Meade turned and met his startled gaze. He jerked
his head forward and down and checked his song.

"They've felt a touch of desolation, eh, Monsel?" he remarked. "I wonder what their commanders are
thinking right now? We gave them 'Hail Columbia'
all right. Well — what had we better do now?" He
turned dazed eyes upon the captain.

"Go back. We've done enough," said Monsel.
"The Miracle has happened, Meade. Look there!" He pointed into the north.

Under the shock of the destruction of their airmen,
the fate of the artillery, and the catastrophe to their
aërial battery, the Japanese wavered; their advance
checked. The men in the destroyer could look across
the wide field of action. Here and there a horseman
— an aide — galloped at frantic speed.

On an eminence signal-flags were rising and falling.
The thin, sweet voice of a bugle came faintly up to

their ears through an open port. While they watched from the now motionless *Miracle* a battery of field-guns, far to the front, suddenly limbered up and began trotting into the south.

A column of infantry halted, about faced, and took up the back track. To the south other columns checked their advance and stood waiting.

Stillman laughed shortly. "They seem to have suffered a change of mind," he remarked.

A crackle of firing came up. The American aëroplanes to the north were signaling wildly now. A cloud of smoke rose on the hillside below the headquarters tents and came swiftly downward.

The armored motors had swung down their long aërial guns and were rushing toward the bewildered Japanese, firing their small explosive shells at the columns of the infantry as they came.

Roaring and belching fire and smoke they swept to the attack. Behind them divisions of American infantry were in motion, coming southward now. A battery of light artillery came up on the run, swung into line, and let fly a volley which swept a retreating regiment of Orientals.

Again Stillman laughed.

"Well, they can get at them now. Go to it, you devils!" he shouted as though the men below him could hear. "They'll get a chance to see how we can fight on an even break now, Monsel. Gad! Look at those chaps serve their guns!"

He indicated the light battery now half-veiled in a haze of smokeless from its own discharges.

The Japanese were withdrawing all along the line, yet it was an orderly retreat. Despite the unseen check which they had received they were still a dangerous

foe, drawing back in excellent order to recover from this first reverse.

Stillman shook his head. "They need another little touching up, Monsel," he chuckled, and started the Miracle once more. "Try the small canister-shells again. I'm going to sail over them not too far up, and show them something new in the line of war. I think I can hurry their steps. Lively now, Monsel." He let the Miracle drop to five hundred feet above the sodden fields.

Under Monsel's orders the tubes were again loaded with the deadly little shells, and as Stillman began moving slowly above the lines of the retreating army they sprayed upon them.

Again and again they spat from the great hulk and fell in a hail of death upon the now terror-stricken men below. The retreat became a rout.

No longer was any semblance of order maintained. Artillerymen cut loose from their guns and left them fast in the mud of the fields. Infantry divisions and brigades and corps split asunder and became masses of flying men, who ran from an invisible foe — a something which hurled death upon them.

The bombs fell and fell. They clung to the bodies of cannon, clung and stuck and burst. Even upon the barrels of rifles they fell and spread instant and dreadful destruction. As they ran the privates of the Japanese divisions threw away their weapons, stripped of their side-arms, freed themselves of every metal object which might prove a lure for the clinging death which seemed to flow above their lines.

Once, twice Meade sent the destroyer from end to end of their width, turned again, and suddenly sank forward against his levers.

Springing to him, Monsel found his shoulders shak-

ing, his whole body racked by nervous tremors. Seizing him by the shoulders he shook him. "Stillman, Stillman!" he cried hoarsely.

Plop — plop — sighed the pneumatic tubes of death.

Stillman raised a white, haggard face, from which everything save a dreadful horror had fled. "Stop it!" he cried out, struggling to rise. "Stop it, Monsel! My God, we're worse than they were!"

"Cease firing!" Monsel's voice arrested the hurrying men at the tubes. The hiss and pop of the pneumatics died. The Miracle swung above a field thick-strewn with the wreckage of war and the flying remnants of an army.

Without a word Meade turned back to his station and headed the ship north toward the headquarters tent.

Armored motors, field artillery, infantry, cavalry, streamed beneath him as he went. The entire American army was returning over the road they had followed the night before. And this time they were the ones who followed an army in retreat. But to Stillman it was blotted out. A sick revulsion was already engulfing his spirit. He wished he could go up to a house that he knew of and lay his head in the soft lap of a girl and listen to her voice — and just — rest.

He grounded the Miracle before the headquarters tent, rolled back the door in her side, and staggered out. The General was standing as he had left him, glasses to eyes. He whirled and stretched out his hands. "Stillman —" he began.

Meade drew himself up with an effort and saluted. And despite all that it meant his voice was almost listless as he made his report: "General, the enemy is in retreat." He hesitated for yet a moment and added: "And now, if you don't mind, I'd like to sleep."

CHAPTER XIX

THE DEATH OF A BRAVE MAN

MONSEL explained the situation to the Commander-in-Chief, and by Meade's own suggestion took the **Miracle** under temporary command.

While Stillman threw himself upon a cot and slept the sleep of utter exhaustion, utterly dreamless, despite the terror of the last hours, the Captain again rose and followed the rout of the Japanese.

Monsel even went as far south as the Potomac and blew up the immense stores of munitions collected at the Harper's Ferry base. Thereafter he headed north again, to repeat the performance of the morning.

Two troop-trains rushing over the Hagerstown road fell victim to his swift assault and literally vanished from the rails as the magnetics struck the steel coaches and engines and blew them to bits.

His attack striking now from south to north added still more to the bewilderment of his foes, with its suggestion of several of the new air-craft hovering above them. The countryside became a vast warren across which men scuttered like rabbits, seeking escape.

Now and then they even caught sight of him, but without their aerial weapons they were powerless to stem the tide of changed fortunes which had overwhelmed them. Robbed of their single means of superiority, they fell easy victims to the pursuing army, now their numerical superior, after the morning's slaughter.

Somewhere around four o'clock the exhausted remnants of their forces surrendered to the American pursuit, were disarmed, and received a ration, taken from their own captured stores.

Monsel returned to find Meade still sleeping in a tent surrounded by a special guard which the General had detailed to the purpose before following his army south. He picked him up, carried him aboard the destroyer, and flew slowly back until he picked up the new headquarters in the field.

The news of the victory was flashed far and wide across the nation, waking widespread jubilation. The name of the Miracle was on every speaking lip. In Chicago a celebration began at once and raged all day and most of the night.

It reached its climax of unrestrained excitement when the surrender of thirty thousand Japanese was bulletined about five o'clock. Vast swarms marched through the streets, singing and shouting. President Gilson received congratulations from his Cabinet with tears of relief and emotion in his eyes.

The Board of Strategy went into session at once, and at six o'clock an order issued to Darling. It was briefly to take the Bernice, now complete under Bellden's efforts, and proceed eastward to capture or destroy the Japanese fleet in the Chesapeake, and so cut off that chance of escape from the now doomed Oriental forces.

Unlike the departure of the Miracle, that of the Bernice was not unmarked.

When the great roof of her housing was rolled back about seven, and she rose with every window and port brightly lighted in order that her outline might be visible to the watchers, a great crowd surged about

the boundaries of the engineering works where she had been constructed and cheered until she faded from sight.

A massed band played national anthems as she rose in the slow majesty of her three hundred feet of length and pointed into the east and south. Darling heard that farewell and smiled.

Another farewell was warming his heart. Bernice, Gethelds, and President Gilson had stood by the little door in the side of the Bernice and bade him godspeed as Arkel and he stepped aboard. The last thing his eyes held as he threw his levers and rose from between the great shed's walls was a girl's white face and parted lips and the flutter of her hand.

Old Belden, standing with craned neck, lowered his face and met the same woman's eyes. He bowed slightly and she smiled. He approached.

"Mr. Stillman's saved his country, miss," he began. "An' Darling will help now with the work. I'll get the Stillman done to-night. They're wonderful things, miss — the work of a wonderful brain. They're miracles, all right. And if you don't mind, would you come up to the laboratory with me for a minute?"

Something in his words and expression urged her. She excused herself to her father and Gilson, and followed the stooping figure of Belden up the stairs to the laboratory, where he approached a safe, opened its doors, and withdrew a package.

With this he came back to her. "I want you to keep this, please, miss," he explained. "I told Mead he ought to put it in a safe place, but he had too much on him for one man at the last. But now that the ship has shown what it can do, it is dangerous to

have them here. And I know no one will guard Stillman's interests as closely as you."

"What is it?" she questioned.

"The formula and working directions for making the plates," said Belden. "Nothing must happen to them — they mustn't be stolen."

"Nothing shall happen to them," said Bernice with decision. She thrust the package into the low-cut throat of her dress, forcing it down out of sight against her body.

"I've burned all the other notes," Belden declared almost proudly. "Of course I saw Meade make them and helped him, but I won't tell."

Bernice smiled. "I am sure both Meade and I know that, Mr. Belden. He thinks a great deal of you, I know," she replied.

"Thank you, miss," said Belden. "You see, I grew very fond of Meade. And to think that now he's a national hero. You must be very proud of that boy of ours."

"I love him," the girl returned frankly. "You are an old man, Mr. Belden, and your experience must have taught you that a woman can say nothing more than that."

"Superlative degree," smiled the engineer. "Perhaps we had best be going back to your father. I've got to finish the Stillman yet to-night."

Morning found the Bernice within sight of the blue Chesapeake waters, flying steadily forward. The passage had been uneventful, and Darling and Arkel had spelled each other in watches, so that both were comparatively fresh. Both felt a quiver of tension, however, as their eyes caught the long line of gray shapes stretched beyond the mouth of the Potomac and re-

alized that the moment of their work was at hand.

"We'll give them a few shells and see if they can take a hint," Harold decided.

Under Arkel's directions the bottom and forward tubes of the Bernice were charged with shell. Darling, sweeping up from the west, rode possibly a thousand feet above the fleet, when he checked his course and swung into line for the attack.

"Take the little fellow down there," he directed. "Gad! It seems a sort of cowardly thing to do after all, Arkel. Still"—his face hardened—"look what they did to our ships, and to New York. You remember what I told you about New York, Arkel, and how you said you'd get even if you got a chance. Well, this is your chance, I fancy. Play ball, Arkel, and get 'em over the plate."

Arkel nodded. "They're murderers, nuthin' else. It's comin' to 'em," he said harshly. He ran back to the pointers at the tubes, indicating the vessel to be attacked. Beneath the Bernice the fleet swam apparently lifeless save for a few small figures working about the decks. "A thousand down and a thousand forward," Arkel directed his pointers. A moment later he spoke almost softly: "Fire!"

An instant followed the plop of the tubes. Then—a series of explosions broke out along the superworks of the torpedo-boat below. The flash of their bursting passed and showed a dismantled hull riding the waters of the bay and listing slowly.

The fleet awoke to sudden life.

Darling waited long enough to hurl some dozen shells upon one of the cruisers, stripping it of superstructure and military masts, while the slow muzzles of the great rifles lifted toward him, then sent the Bernice leaping

aloft, as the first stab of flame and smoke belched toward him from the fleet.

A shot struck the concave walls of the destroyer, glanced off and exploded to one side. The smile on Harold's lips widened at this proof of the difficulty of landing a crippling shot. Two or three other missiles rattled against the plates without other effect than a slight jarring of the ship.

An aërial bomb exploded off to one side as it rose from a ship below. Darling went a little higher to escape any possible elevation of the trajectories of the ship's rifles, and swung above them. Their gray shapes had changed to cotton balls of smoke far below on the water.

Under Arkel's urge, the Bernice began dropping shells into those soft looking whorls, which billowed above the firing ships. As quickly as it had begun the fleet stopped firing. The smoke of their discharging rifles drifted away and showed the white flag of surrender, whipping in the breeze.

Darling nodded in satisfaction.

"Got enough, eh, you beggars?" he chuckled. "Jove, Arkel, I'm glad. This isn't a bit like war, you know. Just a bit of pot hunting if you ask me. Well, let's go down and invite the commander to breakfast." He threw up his levers and let the Bernice sink slowly toward the now silent fleet. Slowly she sank down until she cleared the lapping water by a scant six feet. Behind her were the western shores of the bay, against which her long diamond-like shape swung outlined in majestic proportion. To the watching eyes of the fleet, just beyond her to the east, she must have seemed almost unreal in her sudden coming.

Megaphone at lips, Darling opened the little door

in her side and spoke across the water: "The fleet, ahoy! Send your officers by boat, to arrange surrender!"

"Stay where you are. We understand," a voice replied in excellent English.

Darling stepped back and closed the door. He went back and seated himself at his controls. "Easy that, Arkel," he said smiling, and lighted a cigarette.

A thunderous roar engulfed the fleet, the Bernice, and rolled across the water. Even as Darling set flame to the tobacco between his lips, every gun in every turret on every ship of the Japanese vessels of war was brought to bear on the long, dim shape they had lured within effective distance.

In that one discharge they took a false and desperate chance of eliminating this new engine of war, and regaining their lost advantage at a blow.

Their shells struck with terrific weight and power at that short range, and, despite the angles of the destroyer's hull, she was picked up and driven sidewise by the force of the aggregate impact. Her crew hurled from their feet, sprawled across her floor in a tangle of arms and legs, and clawing fingers, and she reeled as though caught in the vortex of a tornado.

Yet despite all, it was chance which did her damage.

That point where the concave plates jointed in an edge along her sides, was her one vulnerable spot, and upon that edgelike ridge a great shell impinged with an almost irresistible violence. Under its blow the walls bent and buckled, and but for the fact that the destroyer floated and yielded rather than offered a rigid resistance, she must have been riven into a hopeless wreck.

As it was, her inner skin first bent then cracked and

splintered. The air of her conning chamber became full of flying bits of metal. Darling's lips relaxed on his cigarette. An expression of agony passed across his face. It grew pallid, and he lurched in his seat, clutching at his levers.

For in that moment of mortal anguish, his brain still maintained control. While a steel splinter tore through him, he clutched his levers and threw them back and down, with a final supreme effort; felt the Bernice respond to the lift of her plates, and sank unconscious from his seat to the floor.

The upward jerk freed the destroyer from the smoke; and Arkel, staggering to his feet, from where he had fallen, turned toward Darling. What he saw drove him to frantic action. Already the Bernice was five hundred feet up and still rising.

Darling lay doubled up behind his levers.

In a bound his lieutenant reached his side, slammed up the levers to "stability" on the sextant, and checked the rise. Then with a dreadful pounding at his heart, he bent over Harold and straightened him so that he lay upon his back.

A thin, blood-stained froth was oozing from Darling's lips, and a stain on his tunic showed where the steel fragment had struck and pierced his chest. Arkel went to his knees. "Darling!" he choked hoarsely, "Darling!"

The pallid lips made no sound, and the eyes remained closed. A moist rattling, like air in water, came from the wounded man's throat. Arkel laid him down softly and sprang to his feet. A terrible rage woke in his breast.

He jerked around toward the now risen and awestricken crew, and burst into frantic speech: "Load!

Load — you devils! Load up an' give them hell! What are you standing around for? Load up! They've killed him — killed him, damn them! Do you hear?"

He sank back beside the wounded man. "Harold," he said more softly. "Harold, old pal."

Unleashed, the crew of the Bernice sprang to their work. The cough and sigh of the tubes began to whisper a continuous song of death. It fell from the great destroyer in a metal hail, which struck upon turret and rifle tip, and superstructure and hull, and burst in sheeted flares of flame.

A magazine of a cruiser exposed by the destruction of her upper parts, blew up. Her great gray hull split asunder. A battle-ship mortally wounded, reeled and sank. The smaller craft vanished in dreadful swirlings, which rocked their larger sisters, and lashed the surface of the bay to a churning froth.

One by one they weighed anchor those great leviathans of war and sought to escape from that hail of dreadful vengeance. Arkel, who had wound a bandage about Darling, and carried him to a cot in the main room, danced from tube to tube and urged his men to a fury of action.

Some of the flying monsters grew into stripped wrecks, others burst into flames and exploded, still others swallowed on, pursued by the rage they had awakened, until they lost headway and became naught but ineffective bulks. Not until the last ship had grown into a battered ruin did Arkel give word to cease firing.

An hour had passed and the destruction was complete.

Then he went back and relieved the man he had put on the levers, that he himself might direct the fire of

the tubes. He turned the Bernice into the west and began a slow journey toward the probable position of the American army.

She did not handle well.

The buffeting she had received, while not injuring her rising power, had destroyed her right vane, and seemed to have jammed her right-hand turbine so that she jibed in an irritating manner as she flew.

Another hour passed and one of the crew came and touched Arkel's shoulder. "Mr. Darling has opened his eyes," he announced.

Arkel let the Bernice swing at rest while he ran back and stooped above the cot where Darling lay.

He found his eyes open as the man had said, and they turned toward him in question before Harold spoke: "Hello, Arkel!" he said faintly. "What about the fleet?"

"I wrecked 'em — every damned one," grated Arkel.

"They didn't play fair, did they, old chap?" said Darling with an effort.

"Well, they got theirs for it, right after," Arkel choked.

"And where are we?" questioned his commander.

"I was trying to get to the army. You ought to have a doctor," the lieutenant answered. "But she don't fly well. They shot off a wing, an' a turbine is jammed."

Darling smiled faintly. "Do the best you can," he advised, and closed his eyes.

Arkel, his own eyes wet, and running over, stumbled back to his controls.

"You've got to do it — you've got to do it, Bernice," he muttered, as though the ship were a sentient being and could understand. He threw in the drive and

they staggered forward. By two o'clock they sighted the American lines and sank down near a tent where a red cross whipped in the breeze.

Stillman and Monsel had just returned from a flight as it happened, and lost no time in hurrying across, when the crippled Bernice came down. They stood anxious and worried beyond any expression, while a surgeon examined the stricken man, and dressed his wound. When he picked up his dressing kit and left, Meade followed him outside.

"I want the truth, Doctor," he requested quickly.

"Hours," said the surgeon, and turned away.

"No hope at all?" persisted Stillman with a sinking heart.

"None," was the answer. The surgeon faced him for an instant. "He knows it, too, Mr. Stillman. I read it in his eyes."

And so this was the end. The thought gripped Meade's heart as he climbed back aboard the battered Bernice, and came slowly to Darling's side. The end of a very brave life — of a true man.

Harold's eyes turned up to his, and he smiled. "The jig's up, eh, old chap?" he said almost lightly. "That doctor's eyes wouldn't back up the lie of his tongue. Oh, well — By the way, Bernice told me to give you her love, if we met."

Stillman's throat contracted. "Darling," he said thickly. "Old man, is there anything we can do? Can't I take you some place out of here?"

Harold's eyes lighted. "Yes — home," he said on a sudden.

"Home?" questioned Meade. "You mean to Virginia? The Japs are all over down there yet. We haven't cleaned them out yet."

Darling rolled his head on the pillow. "Not Virginia — Chicago," he responded. "'Home is where the heart is'— Meade. I want to see— Biddy — say good-by — you know. You don't — mind?"

"Mind? Great God, no!" said Stillman. "And I'll take you. Monsel, you will take charge of the Miracle. This boat is going to Chicago right away."

"But she won't fly," interrupted Arkel, who had come up in time to hear the remark. "A turbine's jammed and a wing's gone."

"Won't she?" Meade's words were almost savage, and in a way they echoed Arkel's of hours before. "She will for me. She's got to. I built her and she'll fly for me. Get your crew and some wrenches and steel bars. I'll make her fly."

He turned away forward to take charge of freeing the turbine.

An hour later the Bernice rose and fled into the west and north with Arkel and Stillman. Monsel remained in command of the Miracle, and his first act was to return to the scene of the morning's engagement and receive the final surrender of the now powerless and dreadfully punished fleet.

Stillman drove as he had never driven, even on that night of dread two days before, when he went to an army's rescue. Under her master's hand, the great ship cut through the air like a swallow.

They had left the American lines about four, and they followed the daylight westward, but twilight came and dusk and dark, and the stars twinkled above them as they rushed forward. Behind Meade as he drove, Arkel sat beside Darling and moistened a cloth from time to time, and laid it across his forehead.

Yet swift as was their flight, the news of their coming

had flown before them along the wires, so that when late at night, they sank slowly between the walls of the great shed at the plant, an ambulance was already waiting to receive the wounded man.

Once, and once only, Harold moaned as they sped through the streets late in the night. His hand groped out and found Stillman's. "Rotten way to call on a lady," he remarked with an effort at lightness which hurt his companion more than his screams would have done.

He neither moved nor spoke again until they reached the Gethelds home and he was borne into the hall, where a white-faced girl was waiting with wide gray eyes, in which lurked a soul-sick sorrow. "Hello, Biddy," he said as he saw her. "This warrior's coming home on his shield, as it happens."

Bernice bit her lips to suppress a cry.

Yet later, when she crept into his room, where they had laid him in a bed, she had fought back to some measure of calm, under Meade's words and her own efforts. She crossed to his bedside, bent above him. "Oh, Big Brother," she said softly—"oh, Big Brother!" choked, and could say no more.

Darling smiled faintly. "Little Sister," he murmured. He patted the coverlet on which his hand was lying. "Sit down — here beside me," he requested, and when she had complied he went on: "That's nice — awfully nice, Little Sister — nice and comfy. I suppose Meade's told you how it happened?"

"Yes," she whispered and burst into sudden passion. "Oh, the treacherous fiends — they're not human. No fate could be too dreadful for such monsters."

"Mustn't bawl them, Biddy," said Darling. "They're dead, you know. Arkel saw red and sunk

most of them. Bit awful, in a way, but they rather made a bid for it. You see, I am just a victim of misplaced confidence."

"Does it hurt you? Are you in pain?" the woman questioned. Meade watched in sick silence from the other side.

"A little," said Darling. "But it's worth it to go out — here with you — like this."

"But you're not — going out," Bernice protested. "Now that you're here, you're going to get well again, Big Brother."

He shook his head. "What for?"

"Don't!" choked Bernice. Her shoulders began to shake. "Oh, Harold, don't. You remember I told you, I saw it all these months ago, in a sort of vision. It's my fault — all my fault. Oh —! I can't stand it! It's breaking my heart!"

"Forgive me. It was unkind," begged Harold. "I guess it just slipped out, little girl. But I've played the game to the last. I can't stick it much longer. I think I held on some way, all day, just because I knew you were at the end."

He paused and lay panting. Save for that there was no sound in the room beyond the woman's sobbing. In a moment he went on:

"Do you know, Biddy — I always used to think, that when the end *did* come — you'd be beside me — that your arms would sort of hold me back for a little, and not let me slip away too fast. Well — you're here, and I'm going to be a bit selfish, and ask you for something, though I'm afraid may hurt you while it lasts.

"It's all right, though, dear, because Meade's here, and if he objects, we'll call it off. But — what I want — what I want, is for you to lift me up, and sit

up here a little bit farther, and let me put my head back against you — unless it will tire you. Is it too much to ask? It won't be for long."

"No!" said the woman, almost fiercely. "Meade, help me!" She rose, and with Stillman's assistance, seated herself with the pillows behind her, and waited until Meade laid Darling's head in her lap.

Harold sighed. "That's good—" he murmured. For a time he closed his eyes and lay absolutely quiet. Only his breathing showed that he lived. Bernice sat brooding above him, her eyes on his face across which was stealing a shadowy pallor.

At last Darling opened his eyes again. "Biddy," he questioned, "Biddy — are you still there?"

"Yes," she whispered above him.

"Of course." His lips twitched as though he were trying to force them into the curve of pleasure. "I can feel you — but — I can't see you — I can't see you, Biddy — not any more — not ever." He began panting shortly, and then across the quiet of the room his voice came almost like a supplication: "Oh, Bernice — Bernice!"

Quite by impulse she struggled free from the weight of his head, swept his shoulders into her arms, raised him slightly and kissed him. It seemed to her that his lips sought feebly to return the pressure of her own. Then, without any other sign, they relaxed into a nervous line.

His eyes wet with tears beyond any power of controlling, Meade bent and gathered her into his arms. "A true gentleman," he said hoarsely. "May God receive his soul!"

CHAPTER XX

WHAT BELDEN KNEW

ON the day after Darling's death Meade again bade Bernice good-by, took the Stillman, now finished by Belden, and under orders from the president himself, proceeded west, leaving Arkel and Belden to repair the wounded Bernice. It was a mission fraught with no little danger, and Bernice saw him depart with a sickening heart.

At the same time it was deemed advisable to strike quickly in all parts of the country.

The remnants of Carton's army and the volunteer forces collected in the west at the beginning of the war, received orders to concentrate and entrain for immediate service across the Coast Range, so soon as the Stillman should be ready to clear the way before them.

The obsequies of Darling remained to Bernice, her father and the nation. His only relatives, who had fled from the ancestral home in Virginia, were now near Lexington, Kentucky. To them the body was sent on a funeral train.

For three days it lay in state under a guard of honor, its casket draped with purple, a canopy of flags above its head. A military cortège escorted it to the waiting train, which bore it southward.

And so Harold Darling passed.

Meanwhile Belden and Arkel worked steadily in the great shed, which housed the Bernice, and two more days saw the big craft again ready to go into commis-

sion. At Arkel's own petition, seconded by Getholds, at his daughter's urging, Arkel was to be given her command.

He had gone to Bernice before making his request, and she understanding the sentiment which made him want to fly the ship in which the man he loved had gone to his death, had thrown all her influence toward getting him what he wished.

On the night his commission issued he went down to the plant to look over the vast fabric, which had become something like an obsession to his mind, and seemed to call him when he was out of her sight.

He rather expected to find Belden still poking about the shed, as he was in the habit of doing, but was disappointed. He had meant to tell him that he was really to command the great destroyer, and take a fresh hand in the final crushing of the invading armies.

He was full of it, and he wanted to tell some one who would feel about it as he himself did. Not finding Belden in the shed or about the works, he bethought him that he sometimes worked in the laboratory until late at night, and leaving the shed after a final glance at the air-ship, he felt confirmed in his surmise when he found the laboratory windows alight.

Still intent on a talk and a smoke with the old engineer, he walked over, satisfied the guard at the foot of the stairs and went up.

With a feeling of surprise he found the door at the head of the stairs ajar. It was unlike Belden to leave it unlatched, at least. As he remembered, the few times he had been there, the door had always been caught by a spring lock, operated from the inside.

He set a hand to the door, and on second thought rapped.

There was no answer, and after a pause he pushed the door inward, stepped inside and looked about for Belden. For a moment he fancied the place was empty, and then he caught sight of the old man's figure stretched out on the floor, in front of an open safe.

Something in the posture of the body, turned half on its side, and half on its face, caused his heart to miss a beat, and then begin to race wildly. Without waiting to even push the door shut, he ran across and bent over the prostrate figure.

"Belden?" he spoke, and was not surprised when he gained no answer. He put down a hand and turned the man's face to the light.

It was pallid and sallow looking in the flare of the electrics, and across it, stretching downward from somewhere in the hair, was a smear of blood. He put down his hand to the engineer's heart, and found it beating faintly, with a rather slow rhythm; and, while he watched in shocked horror, Belden gasped with an upheave of his chest.

Arkel swept his eyes from the man at his feet and cast them about the room. He had not noticed it before, but the place was in utter disarray. Books and papers from the safe were scattered over the floor, a closet on the wall had been wrenched open and its contents pulled out and thrown about the floor beneath it.

A second little cupboard had had its doors torn open, and they swung wide before his inspection.

Drawers in various tables had been drawn out and not pushed back. Without doubt, the entire room had under-gone a hurried search, and in that instant Arkel felt that he held the explanation of the man's condition.

Some one had come here to get something, Belden had resisted and the other had struck him down, either

gained or failed of what he sought, and gone away, leaving the door as he had found it, off the lock.

He turned and ran back through the door, sprang down the stairs in leaps which cleared several steps at a stride and confronted the startled sentry below. "Who was the last man to enter or leave here?" he demanded.

"You was," declared the man.

"Before that, you fool?" snapped Arkel. "Do you think I don't know I'm here?"

"The last was Colonel Gotz, sir," said the soldier. "He came up with Mr. Belden, and he left about a half-hour ago."

"Colonel Gotz!" cried Arkel. "Oh, the dev! Say, you haven't been off post, or relieved for a while or anything, have you?"

"No, sir. I've been on post for two hours."

"And you don't know that somebody's knocked Belden out and looted the place?" Arkel groaned. "Say — sound an alarm, will you, if you know how to & that?"

The sentry raised his rifle and fired in the air. "Corporal of the guard! Post number nine!" he bawled.

A corporal and his guard of privates rushed from quarters and ran toward Arkel and the soldier, across the yard, beneath the sputtering arcs.

In a moment Arkel had explained briefly and dashed back up the stairs with the petit officer and a couple of privates at his heels.

A glance sufficed to show the truth of his statement, and the corporal spoke to his men: "Stay here, you till I report and get in an ambulance call." He darted away, back down the stairs.

Fifteen minutes later an ambulance with clanging gong drove into the yard of the plant. Belden, still breathing in labored manner and unconscious, was carried down the stairs and placed under its hood. The laboratory was locked and a double guard posted at the top of the stairs by order of the Commandant of the guard at the works.

Arkel insisted that the entire guard about the shed of the Bernice be increased, and after being assured that it would be done, climbed aboard the ambulance and went with the old engineer.

A quick run brought them to the hospital doors. Belden was carried inside and put quickly to bed in a private room. While Arkel stood silently by, the hospital physician made a rapid examination of the injuries the old man had received. As he worked Arkel noticed that a frown grew upon his face.

Presently he rose from his inspection and turned around.

"There are evidences of a fracture of the skull," he remarked. "The man appears to have been struck a heavy blow on the right side of his face, and to have received the cut on his scalp, either from another blow with a dull cutting edge of some sort, or from a fall against something which had the same effect. It was undoubtedly the last injury which fractured his skull."

"His pupils are equal as yet, so we can't be sure if there is hemorrhage of any great extent or not, though his pulse seems to indicate that there may be. Still, in a man of his age, the injuries and the attendant shock may prove rapidly fatal. I can't say yet. Is he a relative of yours?"

"No," said Arkel; "just a friend. Will he recover consciousness at all?"

"Can't say as to that, either," replied the surgeon. "He may and he may not. You can't always tell. It's quite possible that he will. If it's important, I can try to bring him up."

"You'd better, then," decided Arkel. "If he can answer a question or two, and know what he's saying, it may be worth a lot to this country."

The physician's eyes narrowed. "So-o-o?" he said slowly. "Well — Suppose you wait down-stairs in the reception room. I'll see what can be done."

"I'll stick around," Arkel promised, and passed out of the room into a long, half-lighted hall.

He found his way below to the waiting room and sat down. He cast his eyes about. He felt strange and out of place — he, Arkel, now dressed in an unaccustomed uniform, which he had put on before seeking Belden to receive his congratulations.

Now Belden was up-stairs, unconscious, and he was waiting here, where so many had waited before him, waiting for the verdict from the quiet, low-toned tongues of the judges of life and death — as so many would wait after Belden and he were gone.

He shuffled his feet and rose and went over to a window. Presently he bethought himself that he ought to telephone and tell Bernice. He remembered that she and the old engineer had been very friendly. It seemed that she ought to know.

He went out and across a hall to the office and asked for the use of a 'phone. The girl at the switchboard took his number and waved him to a sound-proof booth. "Number two, booth, please," she directed. He stepped in and, a moment later, he heard the voice of Bernice.

He told her quickly what had happened, and he heard

her gasp. "I think," came her voice, surcharged with excitement which he did not fully understand, "I think that I know what the people at the laboratory were after, Mr. Arkel. Mr. Belden once spoke to me about being afraid of something like this. I think — I think, that, maybe, I'd better come over. Dad is here, and he'll come with me. What would you advise?"

"I think you'd better, if you can make it," he told her.

"Then I will. Wait for me there." Her voice died.

Arkel hung up and went back to the waiting room and his introspection. In a way, Bernice's statement that she knew what the attack on Belden meant, had surprised him.

Not but that he suspected that some one had sought the plans of the destroyers and the secret of the radioactive plates, but that he wondered just how much the girl might really know, and if perhaps she would be able to furnish any clue to the identity of the thief.

That Colonel Gotz was in any way implicated he did not for a moment consider. He set the sentry's statement down to a lie told by the man to cover some dereliction of duty, as did also the Commandant of the guards at the plant.

Twenty minutes passed and a motor throbbed past the window. A moment later Bernice and Colonel Gethelds came into the room. Arkel rose and received them and offered them chairs. They sat down.

"Has he recovered consciousness yet?" said Bernice.

Arkel shook his head. "I guess not. The Doctor said he'd let me know."

Under Gethelds's questions he went on to tell all that he knew of the occurrence, which was meager, after all. At Gotz's name Gethelds frowned and fell into a

consideration which held him for some time. They sat on.

Footsteps came down the hall to the door of the room and paused. The white clad form of the doctor filled the door. "He's coming up now," he announced. "You can go up, if you wish." He cast a glance at Gethelds and Bernice.

The Colonel rose and made himself and daughter known.

"I think," said the doctor, "that perhaps this man who came with him had best go up first. You can come later, if the patient desires it. I must warn you that he is extremely weak."

Arkel rose and followed the surgeon back to Belden's room.

The old man lay motionless on his bed, but his eyes were open, with an intelligent light in their depths, and they turned directly to Arkel as he came in.

He crossed to the bed and stood looking down. "Do you know me, Mr. Belden?" he asked softly.

Belden blinked his lids. "He struck me—he struck me," he complained in a feeble voice.

"Who did? Tell me quick, Belden," Arkel felt himself on the verge of an important discovery.

"Wait," Belden muttered to himself and frowned. "Arkel, send for Miss Gethelds. I want to tell her all about it—something she ought to know. She'll understand."

"She's here, now. I told her and she came right over," said Arkel.

"You did right," mumbled Belden. "Have her right up."

Arkel turned to summon Bernice and the Colonel, but found the surgeon already departed on that mis-

sion. "The doctor will get her," he told the man on the bed and sat down on a chair.

The surgeon came back with the two from below, and they greeted Belden.

"Miss Bernice," said he, "I have a story I want to tell. It's a long story, and I want you to write it down. Can you get some paper?"

"I will," volunteered the doctor, whose interest was great. He departed again, on the quest.

Belden continued speaking. "Miss Bernice, I told you I was afraid somebody might try for the plans. You have them safe?"

"I wear them," said Bernice.

Belden smiled. "You love Meade Stillman," he went on, "and it is only right that you should be the one to whom I tell this story, because I, too, love the boy, in my way. It was his trust and yours which saved him and made me strong at the last. Now I want to try and straighten out everything for you and him before I go away."

The surgeon came back with paper, pens and ink.

"If you could write shorthand," said Belden. "It's a rather long story. It covers twenty years."

"I can," declared the doctor. "I used it in taking notes at lectures in college."

"Then you write it down," directed Belden, "and I'll sign it at the end. Are you ready?"

The doctor nodded. He had drawn up a small medicine table near the bed, and now seated himself with his paper and pens.

"This is the voluntary statement of Herman Graf Belden," began the man on the bed; "given in the name of Justice, to free an innocent man from suspicion— Amen!"

"I, Herman Graf Belden, an American of German descent, was in the year A. D.—an employé of a man now known as Jonathan C. Gotz, Member of Congress and principal owner of the Gotz Engineering Corporations. I was at that time, and have been since, a structural and mechanical engineer, and was working in the then small shops of Jonathan Gotz, who had married my sister Martha Belden, deceased, by whom he had one son, the present Colonel George Gotz of the aviation corps. Jonathan Gotz was also at that time deeply interested in local politics, and was an important member of the local machine.

"He was, however, a comparatively poor man. Shortly before this time a reform movement had put a number of new and untried men in office. Among them was one, a Howard Stillman, better known as a chemist and Professor of Science, who was elected to the office of City Treasurer."

Bernice Gethelds caught her breath. She remembered the story Meade had told her. "Was the truth about to come now, after twenty years?"

Belden heard her suppressed gasp, and smiled slightly before he picked up the thread of his narrative.

"As I have said, Gotz was hard up, and desired money for more extensive development of his shops. Also he was of the recently defeated party machine, which was very corrupt. Stillman was a man of probity, but small political or business experience.

"A plot was formed to discredit the new administration, and enrich certain men of the old.

"A clerk in the office of Stillman—an accountant, was taken into the plan. A certain amount of the City funds were stolen, and this clerk so juggled his accounts as to cover the deficit for the time. When the trap was ready to be sprung, a charge of defalcation against Stillman's office was filed, and a committee put on his books. The shortage was discovered.

"The clerk, well paid and protected by his accomplices, was announced as one of the chief witnesses for the prosecution. Stillman was unable to explain something of which he had had no previous inkling, and after a time he was indicted by a Grand Jury. The shock killed his wife, who was ill at the time, and he suddenly disappeared, taking his small son, now Meade Stillman, with him.

"He was sought in a nominal way, but was not found. His flight was accepted as a tacit confession, and the indictment still stands.

"But after the first excitement had subsided my sister Martha, Gotz's wife, came to me and told me that she had discovered positive proof—which, with a list of corroborative names you will find in my rooms—that her husband, my brother-in-law, J. C. Gotz, had profited from the steal in the amount of twenty thousand dollars. I, of my own personal knowledge, knew that he had suddenly decided on extensive enlargements of the shops. My sister and I talked it over and decided to say nothing.

"Stillman had disappeared, my nephew, now Colonel Gotz, was a child, and the dislike of bringing odium upon him and his father seemed to offset any good which would be done by exposing the truth. In this my sister was of course influenced by her love of husband and child, and I as her brother could not bring myself to add to her grief by speaking.

"Therefore, I have lived in silence for twenty years, while a great injustice was done. This is, however, the truth of the theft of the funds and also of the source of the now large fortune of Jonathan C. Gotz. My sister had discovered the entire story of the plot and she told it to me.

"There is nothing more to tell, until quite recently. In the meantime I have continued to make my living as best I could. My sister died some years ago, and left me a little money on which, together with such wages as I receive from such work as I could find, I have lived.

"When I received the appointment to assist Mr. Meade

Stillman in making the lifting devices for the three aero-destroyers, Miracle, Bernice, and Stillman, my nephew, Colonel Gotz, hunted me up at my lodgings and suggested that, provided the ships proved a success, I should deliver the plans and directions for making the radio-active plates to him. He knew that Stillman had not yet protected himself by patents, and his father and he planned to take out all rights in their own names, in advance of such action by Stillman, and thus rob him of the fruits of his work, and lay the foundation for another fortune for themselves.

"I refused to consider his proposition, but he dogged my heels. At last I warned Meade to put his plans in a safe place, but he neglected to do it, under the press of getting the machines ready for service. Then I myself gave them to Miss Bernice Gethelds, and destroyed all other notes.

"To-night while I was in the laboratory at some work, my nephew, Col. George Gotz, came up and demanded the plans. I told him that I did not have them, and that they were not in the place. He grew at first abusive and accused me of lying, next he offered me a share in the profits, and finally he began to threaten, until I told him that he was at liberty to search the room for what he thought was there. He took me at my word, and ransacked the place while I watched him. I even opened the safe in order that he might look through its contents.

"When he was satisfied that I had told the truth he flew into a terrible rage, and demanded that I at least tell him from my own knowledge of the plans and formulas gained in my work. I told him it was useless to ask me to betray the trust which Stillman and Miss Gethelds had reposed in me.

"I went farther and told him that he should know how tightly my lips could be sealed, since it was I who for twenty years had shut them over the secret of his father's theft.

"At that his rage burst all bounds. He screamed out

something about keeping them closed for all time, and leaped toward me where I was standing near the safe, and struck me. I lost my balance and fell, and I suppose, I struck my head against the door of the safe. That is all I remember until I found myself lying here.

"And this is my statement, to the truth of which I call Almighty God to witness, in the hopes that it may be the means of undoing the injustice of twenty years ago, and freeing any other man save my nephew, Colonel George Gots, from any suspicion, in case I should die."

He paused for a moment and then spoke to the surgeon. "Have you got it all down, doctor?"

"Every word," said the medical man.

"Let me sign it and have these others sign as witnesses, too," Belden requested. "Arkel, lift me up."

Arkel held him while he wrote his name at the bottom of the transcription the doctor held before him. Immediately after Bernice, Arkel, Gethelds and the surgeon added their signatures. Belden sighed.

"After twenty odd years I feel like a man again," he said softly. "A secret like that is a dreadful burden to carry, yet it has taken me months to nerve myself to speak, and I doubt if I would have done it, except for what happened to-night: Now I am glad that I have. Miss Bernice, I hope that when all this trouble is over, you and my boy Meade will be very happy. God bless you for a sweet woman, my dear. And now I think I will take a little nap."

Gethelds himself took charge of the written pages, and they left the room very softly, after saying a quiet good-by.

An hour later a nurse found the old engineer apparently sleeping. And the sleep that he slept was the one which has no waking in the flesh.

CHAPTER XXI

THE SUPREME MIRACLE OF ALL

"WHEN you come home bring your father with you.
His name has been cleared."

Such was the message Bernice sent to Stillman in the West. Her own father had assured her that there would be no question but what the charge against Meade's father would be quashed by due legal process.

Such assurance was made doubly sure by the action of Gotz, father and son. They fled the city in advance of those who went to serve warrants upon them on a number of charges, not the least of which was one of manslaughter against the Colonel. His flight increased the count, by adding that of desertion to the list.

Already the situation all over the country was beginning to straighten out.

In the East the army, with Monsel and the Miracle to assist, had regained most of the lost ground. Deprived of their fleet, whose terribly battered hulks either rode in ineffective ruins, or rested on the Chesapeake's floor, mute monuments to Arkel's berserk rage on the death of his commander, they surrendered with small resistance and were herded into concentration camps to await arrangements for their deportation.

Meade flying into the West with the Stillman, expecting to face the dreadful necessity of inflicting more slaughter, was most happily surprised.

From Canada to Europe, the news of the fate of the Atlantic forces had flashed by cable, and thence on around the globe to Hawaii, and from there by wireless between the units of the Oriental fleet to San Francisco. The effect was to shake the over-burgeoned confidence of the Japanese in possession of the Pacific Coast.

Before they could devise any effective defense against the new power of their opponents the Stillman itself hovered above the Bay and the City and cast down a demand for their immediate surrender upon the alternative of instant destruction if they refused.

By a sort of poetic justice they found themselves in the same position which had compelled the city's surrender to themselves some months before. They chose life and defeat to death.

The troop trains came down from the mountains, and advanced under the Stillman's protection. Sacramento was forced to surrender and was occupied. The surrounding country was freed from its recent garrisons by a few well directed shells, which gave ample demonstration, rather than caused loss of life.

Other trains loaded with fresh troops came down the valley to the Bay of Oakland, where Arkel in the Bernice, which he had brought on from Chicago, had been standing guard above the Japanese fleet, which had sailed into the Bay and landed its crews on Stillman's demand.

Meade came with the troop trains, and guarded the march of the Federal forces through the streets of the recaptured city of San Francisco. Afternoon found the stars and stripes again whipping from the staff on the Presidio parade.

Vast quantities of aerial bombs, both at Sacramento and the Presidio, and on board the vessels of war, were

seized and destroyed. Crews were thrown on the vessels to hold them, and patrols moved about the streets of the city. Once more San Francisco was in American hands.

The yielding of the Japanese was, in a way, as spectacular as their capture of the city had been. Numbers of their officers committed hara-kiri at the time of the surrender, but beyond that there were no direct casualties attending the reoccupation.

For days and weeks the pacification of the State went on in a similar fashion. As fast as troops were sent in from over the mountains either Stillman or Arkel met them, and led them from point to point, guarded their occupation, hovered above them until the menace of their surroundings had grown within their own ability to control, and returned to repeat the performance.

Nowhere was any serious resistance met with.

A spirit of discouragement and fatalistic acceptance seemed to have fallen upon the Orientals. They seemed to realize their inability to cope with the well-nigh invisible things which rode the air above them. They were herded into central points until they could be sent back home.

Meanwhile the Federal Government had not been idle. With the aid of the British embassies, negotiations were opened with Tokyo, with a view to peace. Robbed of its navy, depleted of means for any rebuilding, or further prosecution of the war, the Mikado's government was not in a position to refuse.

A treaty was arranged in which Japan surrendered all claim to the Hawaiian and Philippine Islands, and agreed to order and compel the removal of all her subjects from the former group. In addition, she was

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asked for an indemnity in cash, which would strain her credit for years.

Resistance being useless, she accepted, and announced that she would send ships to carry her captive armies from the Pacific ports to her shores.

Throughout the territory occupied by the Orientals, the American people were already returning to their abandoned homes. East, west and south the lines of travel became flooded with their advance, even as they had been thronged with their retreat. Already plans were forming for the rebuilding of destroyed cities on a greater, a finer scale than before.

A week from the final surrender of the Japanese in the East saw men walking amid the ruins of burned and fallen buildings, arranging for the sale and removal of débris.

In Washington itself the destruction was small. The Japanese occupation being unresisted, seemed to have been marked by little vandalism on buildings or other property. Possibly they intended preserving it for a governmental seat for themselves, should they succeed in making their occupation of the eastern part of the country permanent.

As a consequence the return of the Federal Government from Chicago amounted to little more than a re-occupation of its former quarters. Within the private homes and business houses looting had, of course, been general, but the city as a city was intact.

The middle of March found Bernice and her father back in the Connecticut Avenue home. She had had several messages from Meade, telling of his safety and the work 'Arkel and he were doing. They were together in the West still.

Monsel with the Miracle was stationed at Washington itself. The Captain had called upon her once or twice between cruises. In all save Meade's presence things were coming to almost a normal state in her life.

And Meade's presence was to come. There came a day toward the end of March when he left Arkel and the Bernice in charge, entered the Stillman and rose up and across the mountains and fled over deserts and other mountains to a land of red sandstone buttress and pinnacle and bastions, where the wind blew and whirled the red dust round and round.

And flying high above that place of desolation he swam above a small oasis, already touched by the promise of spring, till it lay like a green gem stone in the palm of a brown and wrinkled hand.

Sinking down, he grounded the great air-ship before the door of a sandstone hut, climbed down from her side and went in search of his father. Their hands met in the grinding grasp of men who seek to conceal a gripping emotion. "It has been a long time, my boy," said the elder. "There has been no word, and I have waited and hoped. Tell me — what have you done?"

"All that I went to do," Meade told him. "Spring Water said you were asleep. You must have been or you would have surely seen me when I landed. The Stillman is outside. Come have a look at it, dad."

Howard Stillman found that he trembled. So the image of his dreams was just outside. He walked beside Meade and stood for a long time in silence, gazing at the mighty hull.

"Just as we pictured, my boy," he said at length. "And she's saved a nation. What is twenty years to that? Perhaps the God of battles sent me here to prepare."

"It is ended, father," said Meade, in a voice that broke at the finish. He showed him the message Bernice had sent. "You are going back with me," he declared gladly. "I've come to take you back to the world of men."

The hand which held the telegram trembled. Stillman raised his eyes from the sheet of yellow paper and looked at his son. "The world of men," he repeated slowly. "Meade, my son, I think I should like to go with you for a time."

So that it happened that in the dawn of a new day the Stillman rose from that oasis womb, and swept her creator back to the outside world of men.

A faint green was tipping the twigs of the trees and the sides of the hills, washing them in like the first brush strokes of the Master Artist on a fresh canvas, when Meade came down on Washington, and sought out the Connecticut Avenue home. The breath of the spring had crept into his blood, and sent it leaping — thrilled him with its promise of new beginnings, new life, new hope and ambition, as he went to find Bernice.

A soft night followed the day, with a full round moon, which flooded the sleeping city, and the rolling hills and the porch of a home, where a man and woman were sitting, the hand of the woman held fast by the man.

"And you won't go back any more, dear," she whispered. "You'll stay here with me, after this?"

"I hope so," said Stillman. "I think that I can. It's just about finished, sweetheart — all the sorrow, and struggle, and horror. I scarcely think they'll need me any more. The miracle as they call it just now is practically complete. I think that from now on it can be just you and me."

"It seems strange," Bernice began gently. "All

the time you were growing up to your manhood in the desert, and I to womanhood here, and we never knew. And then you came, and we met, and we spoke, and after that we were never the same again. I can remember your face that first night when you promised that you would come back if ever the country should call you or I."

Meade laughed softly.

"And there wasn't a minute after that when you didn't call me — in my heart at least. From that time I began to want to be a man like other men. You were so beautiful — so wonderful to me. I had never seen a creature like you. I used to quiver just thinking of you, dear.

"I think I felt something like those old chaps of medieval story who received a visitation from a being of a different world — a sort of miraculous vision of something supremely good, and beautiful, and pure. And that, Bernice, is how I hold you now, in the deepest chambers of my soul.

"You were my miraculous visitant, who came to lead me out of bondage into a fuller, a wider life; and set me free. Let others talk all they want about miracles, sweetheart. You are the one Supreme Miracle to me."

She leaned toward him, wide eyed, parted of lip, her breath sweet as the breath of the night and the spring. Her every line as full of ripened promise as the golden circle of the moon which flooded her face and glinted in her hair. "Boy of mine," she said in a voice half tears, half laughter, "the Supreme Miracle is Love."

THE END

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